

Go,
Rebuild
My Church!

**Comprehensive
Course on the
Franciscan
Mission
Charism**



Biblical
and Prophetic
Basis of the
Franciscan Mission

Lesson Unit 5

The documents of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* have deeply affected the understanding of mission. Constant efforts are being made to clarify its purpose and objectives, and to determine the most appropriate methods to carry it out. *Go, Rebuild My Church: A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*, provides a particular context to stimulate dialogue about the many dimensions of mission and the inevitable recognition of the equality, dignity and humanity of all persons. The course is unique, since it is genuinely inter-Franciscan and inter-cultural. An ongoing process for exchange among all members of the Franciscan Family from six continents provides for a creative meshing of the best in current theology, Franciscan research and pastoral practice. The vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent our search for a fuller understanding of humanity in the light of the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

As Franciscans, with the world as our "cloister," we welcome this refreshing moment of intercultural dialogue. Francis was the first among founders to situate the missionary dimension of the Gospel call clearly within his rule. This study reawakens us to the challenge and genuineness of Francis' message for our own times.



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Biblical and Prophetic Basis of the Franciscan Mission



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Biblical and Prophetic Basis of the Franciscan Mission

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How Francis had King Otto Warned

Francis was staying with his brothers in Rivotorto. He was intent on showing the brothers that only one thing was important: God! Therefore he withdrew

into his hut in order to seek an encounter with God. At that time King Otto IV was processing with pomp and clamour through the region to obtain the imperial crown of the

earthly kingdom in Rome. Francis, however, whose hut was not far from the road on which Otto was travelling, would not let himself be disturbed. But, nonetheless, one of the brothers had to place himself in the way. He was supposed to say to Otto that his fame was only of short duration. Francis felt like a prophet of the old covenant, like Elisha, who sent his servant to the great commander of the Arameans (cf. 2Kgs 5; Lk 4:27). He, too, had to tell the great ones of this world where the real power in the world lies (cf. 1 Cel 43).



Elijah meets King Ahab calling him to repentance.

I have continued to send you all my servants the prophets... but you would not listen (Jer 35: 15).



Introduction

A



Foundations of the Franciscan Movement

"A different foundation than that which has been laid", is not what Francis wanted to lay (1 Cor 3:11; 1Cel 18). He was consciously within the biblical tradition. Thus, even the Franciscan movement had to conform to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

It is important, therefore, to dig for this foundation, if it has been buried, or to study it, if one is unaware of it.



Pope Innocent III blesses Francis and his Rule.

Survey

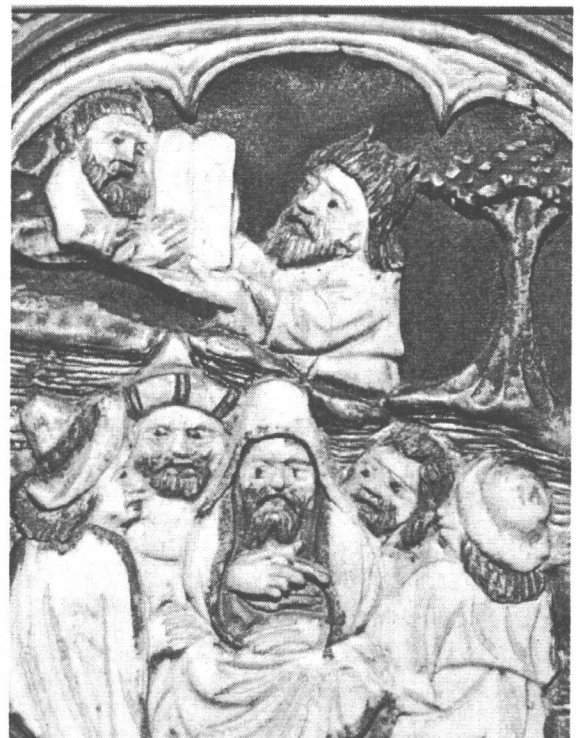
B



When we inquire about the foundation

of the Franciscan mission, we must not answer too hastily. We shall see that, first of all, false assumptions must be removed before reaching the underlying essential reality, namely: that the vocation of the Franciscan movement lies on the same plane as the vocation of the People of Israel. This is to say that God is committed to a people who stand in obedient relationship, who live in loving community with God, who bring others to God through its priestly service and is filled with the holiness of God.

With this basic reality in mind, we can now speak of the biblical prophets and prophetic communities which arise whenever Israel is untrue to its calling.



Moses receives the Ten Commandments.



On closer view, one will discover that Jesus and the early Church are firmly rooted in the prophetic tradition. Their mission is the fulfillment of the calling of Israel in a new covenant. As soon as the Church merges with prevailing social structures, the prophetic vocation becomes all the more necessary, even in the young Church. This becomes clear in connection with an historical event:

In 325 under the emperor Constantine, Christianity became the religion of the State. As a re-

sult of this turning point, people arose to take over the task of the prophets: Christians who understood the dangers inherent in this change organized themselves according to the model of the early Church.

Finally, the questions that must be asked are: to what extent Francis stands in that prophetic tradition and, as a result, what expectations can be asked of the Franciscan family?

Information

C



alse Assumptions – The Real Starting Point

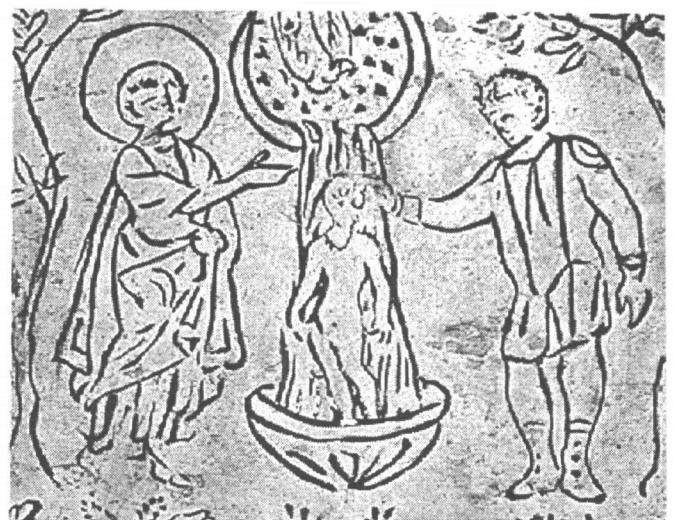
It is peculiar that religious life is not mentioned in the Bible. This is all the more strange as reli-

gious life seems, to many people, to be a characteristic sign of the Church.

The Evangelical Counsels

It is generally held that Jesus laid the foundations for religious life in what were later called the “*evangelical counsels*”. But this is false and misleading. The New Testament community itself decisively fought the notion that there were two kinds of discipleship or two kinds of spirituality between which the followers of Jesus had to choose. This was a controversy about the very nature of the early church.

The Letter to the Galatians, the “*Magna Charta*” of Christian freedom, provides convincing proof of this freedom. Paul most vehemently opposes Peter’s views on this matter: the community of the Church must not be divided into those who follow the Gospel simply and those who follow it with a set of rules attached to it (cf. Gal 3).



A Baptism Scene.

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Gal. 3:27).



According to Paul we have to decide between two possibilities, either for

- the "life of the flesh": a life without Jesus, a life in self-absorbed isolation or for
- the "life of the spirit": a life with Jesus, a life with God, a life in solidarity with all peoples.

There are, therefore, not two ways to God, but

rather a generally binding common spirituality. Once again: "A careful study of the New Testament shows that it contains absolutely no basis for a distinction between two groups of Christians, of which one is called to a higher ideal than that of the other" (J. Tillard). J. Murphy-O'Connor OP, goes even further to say: "In as far as there are Evangelical Counsels, they pertain to Christians as a group" (4f.).

The Real Starting Point: The Biblical Prophets



We cannot and must not derive religious life from individual passages of Scripture. This however, does not mean that it has no biblical basis at all. Its roots lie much more deeply in biblical tradition. It ultimately goes back to the prophetic

movement in Israel. This experienced its high point in Jesus and His disciples and later received diverse expression in religious life, not the least in the form which originated with Francis.



The Calling of Israel

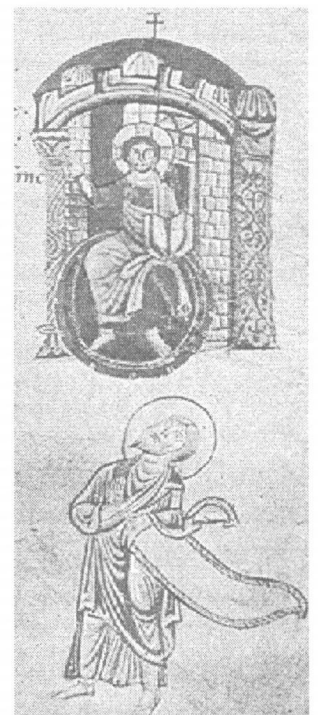


In order to understand the profession of a prophet, one has to understand the calling of Israel:

Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6).

In this central text one can distinguish two sides:

- **On God's side** there is only one element: grace, election, calling. God wants to be what His name promises: Yahweh – creating and saving presence. His people shall never more be alone.
- **On the side of humanity** there are four elements: listening, keeping the covenant, being priestly and being holy.



The Prophet
Isaiah
receives the
Revelation
from God.



Listening

2.1.

If the people of God are not a listening people, if they are not continually sensitive to the call of God, then they are not a people any more. The Hebrew word for "to hear, to listen" (*shamah*) is also the word for "to obey," or "to answer." What makes them the "People of God" is, above all, openness towards God and time spent in hearing what the voice of God is saying here and now.



The Listener.

Keeping the Covenant

2.2.

The Hebrew word for Covenant *berith* does not translate very easily. Paul tried to express it for his time with the word *diatheke*, or *testament*. It expresses the deep mystery of the relationship we have with God and with each other. But how can one put into words the inexpressible, how can one put into words the deepest mysteries of life?

Throughout the Hebrew Testament there were many efforts to find analogies. Hosea compares the relationship between God and humanity to that loving relationship between husband and wife. Two people decide to share life together, not only in the intimacy of sexuality, which cel-

brates their love, but in the totality of their lives together. Realizing that even this analogy cannot capture the meaning of God's Covenant, Hosea uses another image and compares it to the love of a parent for a child (Hos 11).



Image for God's Covenant:
The love of a parent for a child.

Or perhaps *covenant* could best be translated by *community*. However, even *community*, is an ambiguous word. But perhaps that is how it should be, since it is trying to express the multifaceted nature of our relationship to God. The Israelites, like ourselves, had to search constantly and to discover anew what it meant to be God's people. We too may not be able to explain fully what it means to belong to a people in a community in God's Covenant. Yet, we, as they did, can strive to find ways to celebrate and live out that bond so that others will be led to wonder why we are what we are, and begin to question their own lives.



Being Priestly

2.3.

We have just been discussing the necessity of celebrating the Covenant. The people of God must, therefore, be a priestly people. This means, they must be mediators of the reality of God. By the way they live, others will begin to perceive the God they cannot see. The community, precisely because it is a loving, trusting, sharing, celebrat-

ing community, will be an evangelizing one, making others aware of the presence of the living God. It is clear that being a priest involves the proclamation of the Good News of the Gospel which brings others to an awareness of the living, loving God and to a commitment to Him. This is not achieved by words alone, but by life itself.

Being Holy

2.4.

This life should be holy. In the Bible *holiness* means: belonging to God, being taken up into the reality of God, sharing divine life and love. It means being immersed in the mystery of the God who is completely other. Holiness also means seeing life and the world from God's point of view, and living a lifestyle that flows from that point of view. This brings us full circle, since to be immersed in the reality of God requires that one be constantly listening to God.

Even one of the greatest of the prophets, Elijah, had to learn that Yahweh does not always speak the way the prophet wanted (1 Kgs 19). The prophet expected the Lord to speak to His people in a great tempest, earthquake or fire. Elijah thought in terms of a voice that would shake them and arouse them. But it was through none of these that the Lord wanted to speak. It was in the "voice of a whispering breeze."

To be a good listener means to be open to every possible way in which God might speak. Holiness and the very existence as God's covenanted community depended on it.



The Father's hand from Heaven:
a symbol of all divine actions among humankind.





he Priests

Because of the importance of listening, a certain group among the people were set apart to be professional listeners: the priests. It was their primary function to proclaim *Torah*. Unfortunately, in later Judaism *Torah* often came to be understood as the written Law. Thus the impression arose that all that God had to say was totally contained in the Law. This was not so in the beginning when *Torah* meant God's will.



Reading the Torah.

Another but subordinate function of the priests was the celebration of the liturgy. As soon as this became the primary task, however, the proclamation of the *Torah* suffered. The purpose behind the ceremonies of the liturgy consisted in

helping the people celebrate their relationship with God and with one another. Without *Torah*, however, nothing could be known about this relationship. Without *Torah*, without an attentive ear to the will of God, the rituals of the liturgy became empty forms and meaningless formulas. When this happens, one thinks that God can be kept in a good mood or that God can be manipulated. Services no longer are an expression of a vital relationship that needs to be lived out in life.

This loss of a sense of their vocation among the priests led to an identity crisis among the people.

...for with you is my contention, O priest... You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children (Hos 4:4-6).

Knowledge (Yada) does not mean knowing speculatively. It means to know another to the degree that two lives become one. In its deepest meaning this word is used to celebrate the total unity of man and woman. "Adam knew Eve as his wife" (Gen 4:1). Hosea's problem was not that the people did not know their catechism sufficiently, but that they did not love their God. "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they do not know the Lord" (Hos 5:4). It is this meaning of knowledge that Paul has in mind when, years after his conversion, he wrote: "All I want is to know Christ" (Phil 3:10). He doesn't complain that he hasn't enough time for christological research, but he longs for a deeper union with his Lord.





The Prophets

Once again the failure of the priests to impart Torah was responsible for the people not *knowing*, that they were no longer in loving unity with their God. So the people were thrown into a crisis of identity. God personally had to intervene once more, raising up prophets. They were to remind the priestly caste why it had been established. They were to recall the people to its original calling: that of being a listening, priestly and holy people, living in a covenant with God.

A prophet is a person who does not allow a means to become an end, the outward forms to be pursued and served for their own sake, . . . who constantly reminds us that the real truth of the present lies further in the future and at a higher level, who fiercely points to the spirit that lies behind every shape of the letter (Yves Congar).

Prophets belong to their time. *In what sort of circumstances do prophets arise? A short answer is to say that they appear when they are needed. What sort of times are these? They are times when the community has forgotten its calling and has somehow become fixed or self-satisfied. So it is unable to carry out its mission*



Prophets Isaiah, Daniel and Jeremiah.

because it is no longer aware of what that mission is. When the people of God had achieved a certain amount of worldly prosperity and power through war, diplomacy and trade, it was easy to forget that they were dependent on the call of God, and that this is what they were for. They did not realize that they were God's people, and not their own people with God on their side, as they were sometimes inclined to think. The mission of the prophets then was essentially to recall the people to their original vocation (R. Haughton).

Individual Prophets

4.1.

Again and again great individual personalities arise who call out to the people with a prophetic voice. We generally associate, incorrectly, this prophetic call with the words they use, their preaching. However, before the prophets open their mouths, they preach with their lives. The message would not be credible, if the prophets' life-style were not a mirror in which one could recognize the message.

The real message of the prophets is thus mirrored in an intense, day-to-day living of the covenanted life. Over and beyond this, God calls upon the prophets to perform or to omit certain actions so as to challenge the people. Hosea shows his grieving, broken heart at the infidelity of his beloved wife. He gives his children names that would make the people sit up and take notice: "*Lo-ruhama*" (love has disappeared)



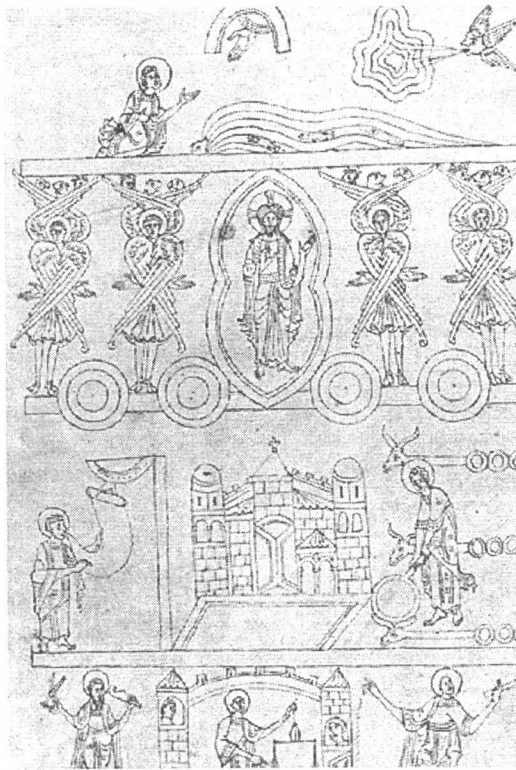
and "Lo-ami" (covenant is broken). This is a real challenge thrown down before the people to make them think about their relationship with God (Hos 1:6ff; cf. Jer 13; 16; Ez 4; 5; 12; 24).

The prophet Jeremiah also performs an impressive symbolic act (Jer 13). He has to walk through the city, wearing his dirty undergarment that had been rotting in the earth. This undergarment which is worn close to the body is a sign of the intimate closeness which exists (or at least should exist) between God and the people of Israel. Jeremiah wants to

shock the people of Israel. They are no longer close to God; they are far away; they are now a filthy, rotten, evil-smelling people because of their sinfulness and infidelity. In Chapter 16,

Jeremiah gives a list of the different ways in which the prophetic challenge to the people is to come more through his life than through his words.

Ezekiel, too, (Ez 4; 5; 12; 24) is to use his life and his deeds as a sign challenging the smugness, the superficiality, the complacency and false values of the people.



The illustrator of the "Bible of Noailles" sees with the eyes of the prophet. From top to bottom: On the bank of the river the hand of the Lord comes over Ezekiel, accompanied by a mighty hurricane and a cloud (Ez 1:3-4); the throne chariot of

God with its wheels and Cherubim (Ez 1:15-21); Ezekiel swallows the roll of the book (Ez 3:1) and mimes the siege of Jerusalem (Ez 4) as well as the destruction of the city by cutting the hair of his head and beard (Ez 5).

Prophetic Communities

4.2.

There are also prophetic communities who, through their communal life and life-style are prophetic witnesses. Thus the *disciples of Isaiah* separate themselves from the people, to listen to and interiorize the prophetic word, so that they may be "signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts" (Is 8:18).

The *Nazirites* are another distinct prophetic group within the community. The Book of Numbers, chapter six records their rule and constitutions. Strong drink is prohibited, especially any sort that is made from grapes.

This abstinence is meant to remind the larger community of their wanderings in the wilderness. As nomads, they had no wine, nor any of the other amenities that come with a sedentary, agrarian form of life. Consequently, they had nothing to draw them away from fidelity and openness to their God. The prohibition against cutting hair had the same purpose: to remind the community of the fidelity they had when they led less complicated lives in the desert.

That their witness was effective and disturbed



the people in their complacency is testified by the fact that their opponents tried to silence these prophets (cf. Am 2:11f).

Jeremiah mentions another prophetic community, the Rechabites (Jer 35) who not only practiced abstinence from alcohol, but also lived as nomads, avoiding permanent dwellings, planting no crops, and living in tents. Thus, they were a living reminder of the birth of the people of Israel during the exodus from Egypt and the desert wandering. The people of Israel, addressed by Hosea as the Bride of Yahweh, looked upon this "golden age" with a certain wistful longing:

Therefore I will now allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her... she shall respond as in the days of her youth as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. (Hos 2:14-15).

It is a similar testimony that is heard in the New Testament:

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first (Rev 2:4-7).

The prophetic witness does not demand that the wider community should imitate the life-style of the prophets. This form of life should merely serve as a challenge to society to live out its com-

mitment in greater devotion and to have the right priorities.



I was hungry and you fed me...
I was sick and you took care of me (Mt 25:35f).

Prophetic Commitment to the Poor and for Justice.

4.3.

The individual prophets and the prophetic communities wish to make the Torah, the original will of God, effective through their lives and their preaching. God's will is going to be thwarted, however, if the rich exploit the poor. Therefore, the prophets do not just question single elements in the Jewish liturgical rites, but the liturgy itself. For "the congregation are celebrating their own standard of life when

they do so and are ignoring the Will of God Who has placed Himself at the side of the poor" (B. Flammer).

"Seek Me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal," says Amos (Am 5:4-5). In the final analysis, a piety that has freed itself from its social responsibility, a form of liturgy that is self-justifying, a holy place where the poor have no right to be, count for nothing.



To seek out Yahweh, the defender of the poor, is the same as doing justice, obliges us to overcome the injustice done to the poor and weak. True service of God creates social justice. Into the swelling accords of solemn music, into the harmony of the choirs and into the running streams of sacrificial fats, Amos hurls his denunciation: "But let justice roll down like waters, and right-

eousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5:24) (B. Flammer).

In all the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Testament this basic theme of justice is returned to, time after time: True service of God is validated by service to the poor, in a community sense (*hesed*), in commitment to real justice among people.



he Prophetic Intention of the New Testament

Again and again, the people of the Old Testament were reminded of their calling by individual prophets and through prophetic commu-

nities. Does the New Testament contribute anything new to this, or does it merely continue in the prophetic tradition?

Jesus and His Disciples



I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another (Jn. 13:34).

The early Christian community looked upon Jesus as a prophet. He defined himself as such when he declared: "Prophets are not without honour except in their own country and in their own house" (Mt 13: 57). He and those to whom he ministered saw His role to the community as a continuation of the prophetic charism (cf. Mt 16:24; 21:11-46). It is as a prophet that He gathered disciples to continue His work. As a prophet He cut through the legalism and

the institutionalisation of Judaism, leading it back to its original vocation.

He said to him: "You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Mt 22: 37-40).



This is not a new teaching, but a quotation from their very own scriptures (Dt 6:5; Lev 19:18).

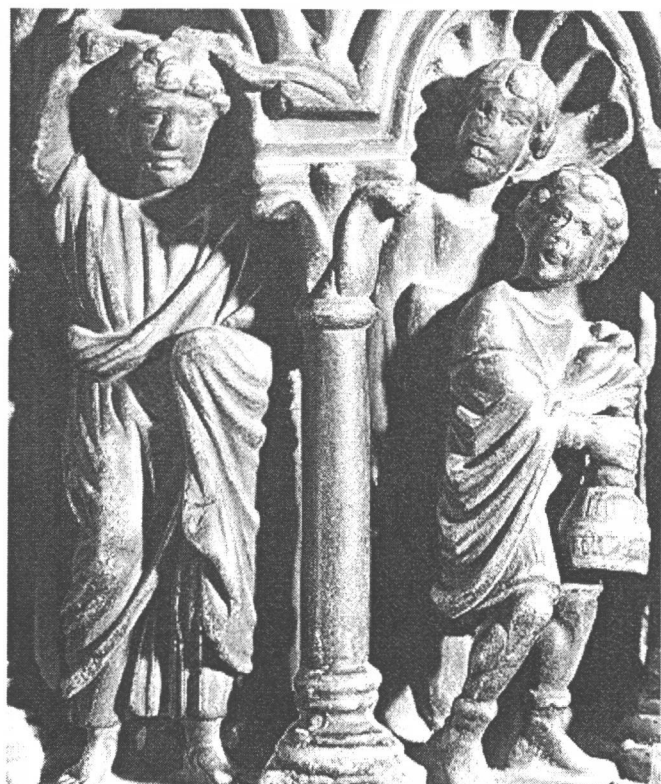
It was to a community of love that he called His disciples:

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another (Jn 15:17). Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another (Jn 13:34).

Therefore, Jesus and His disciples lived the original calling of the people of Israel within the community of Jewish people. Here, two aspects deserve special emphasis:

- Jesus and His disciples continue the tradition of nomadic existence of many of the prophetic groups: they must leave everything: house, family, all that they possess. Jesus has “*nowhere to lay his head.*” They wander through the land as a prophetic group in order to bring the Good News to the poor, and this they do by sharing the fate of the poor. They want to bring the peace of the Kingdom of God. And this they do by renouncing all violence and having peace in their hearts. The method is in harmony with the goal.
- Like the prophets of the Hebrew Testament, Jesus and His disciples devote themselves to justice and to the poor who have no hope in this world, anymore, but who can hope for everything from God. In contrast to the official representatives of Judaism, Jesus and His disciples place them-

selves at the side of the poor. To what extent this is in harmony with the prophetic tradition can be seen in the symbolic action of Jesus’ driving out of money lenders from the Temple (cf. Mt 21:12-17). The house of God should really be a house of prayer, not a house in which the strangers are discriminated against and from which the poor are excluded (cf. Is 56:1-8).



Expulsion from the Temple.

Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were buying and selling in the temple (Mt 21:12).

The Church

5.2.



To express the intense bond which unites Jesus and His disciples, Paul uses the word *koinonia*. This is often translated as *fellowship*, or *communion*, or *discipleship*. In the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, *koinonia* is only used to refer to people involved in a common endeavour or project. For Paul, however, it is the common designation for the community which God’s Son entered into and formed into a *koinonia*. This

relationship is so intense and intimate that it is said to be a *koinonia* in the spirit.

The fundamental reality of the Church, then, is that it is community, people, *koinonia*, the Body of Christ. God’s word is an invitation to be that. For this reason Christ has come. The Church has no other reason for existing. Paul would be dismayed to hear religious say; “*We want to form a community.*” If they could do it without **Him**,



then there would have been no need for His coming. He is the one who creates community; he reconciled Jew and Gentile.

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it (Eph 2:14-16).

What we can do is to celebrate and live out that reality. Luke understands it in this way:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, koinonia, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).

This description provided the pattern for all ecclesial communities in the first two centuries. They were an underground Church in a world where it was dangerous to be a Christian. They supported each other in living out the reality of the Gospel together. The four Gospels came into existence in order to help the communities to live as *koinonia*, as a community, as the Body of Christ. They were written for and by the community in an attempt to find answers to their own questions.

As in the Hebrew Testament, the Christians responded to the call of God. They wanted to

be attentive to the divine word, to live in profound communion with God, to be priestly mediators of the idea of God, to be steeped in the holiness of God. There was no need for prophetic communities. The Church itself was a prophetic community.



They were persevering in the breaking of the bread and in prayers (Acts 2:42).

6.



Religious Orders as Prophetic Communities

Why did religious orders come into existence?
What made prophetic communities in the Church
a necessity?



The Changed Situation

6.1.

The situation of the Church underwent a fundamental change when Christianity was declared a state religion under the emperor Constantine at the beginning of the 4th century.

The Church, no longer underground or oppressed, became a haven for all. Membership was necessary to get a government job or to rise in the civil service. As the numbers increased so did the extent of superficiality. Membership in the Church was no longer a decision of a

person's faith and Christian life lost its vitality.

The result of this was the rise of the popular Church with its institutions and forms of organization, larger buildings and a highly developed form of government with many new official functions. All this had been unnecessary in the primitive Church. In those first two centuries, apart from a few hermits and the occasional prophet, there was no such thing as organized religious life.

The Model of the Primitive Church

6.2.

Just as the prophetic movement arose in response to institutionalization in the development of the Hebrew Testament, the same process was repeated in the Church. The leaders of the Church were so busy with the institution that they often neglected to cherish life in the community and for the community. Someone had to stand up and remind the Church of the reasons for its establishment. Religious life came into being.

It was then that certain individuals began to see the difference between the Church as they knew it and the first Christian communities. They began to live spontaneously the ideal of the primitive Church that is described in the Acts of the Apostles:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved (Acts 2:44-47).

Thus, the original forms in monastic communities were simply modelled after the pattern of the first primitive Christian communities. John

Cassian writes that the first religious went apart "to practice those things which they had learned to have been ordered by the apostles throughout the body



Francis is called out of the community in order to speak to it.



of the Church in general" (Conference 18, Ch. 5). In other words, groups withdrew themselves from the wider community in order to live out the prophetic charism.

There have to be these two apparently contradictory aspects to a prophet. He belongs to a community and yet he is apart from it. The traditional image of a prophet who goes out into the desert expresses this. He is in some way apart from the structures that make the community work in the ordinary way... The prophets are called out of the community in order to speak to it (R. Haughton).

Whatever other tasks may be laid upon those who live in a religious order, the primary task consists in recalling the Church to the Gospel. Without the emphasis on that aspect, life in a religious order would degenerate to nothing more than social work and cheap labour.

Because of their prophetic role in the Church, religious orders will always have to live in a certain tension in their relationship with the institution, wherever institutional structures have

become rigid and where the maintenance of positions has become the main concern. The danger of the individual being made use of by the institution is constantly present.

The prophet proves to be disturbing and, therefore, meets with resistance, since he questions the existing power structures as far as they cripple life and no longer serve the people. This can happen in the field of politics and the state as well as in the ecclesiastic area. Prophets have always been disturbing and were exposed to all kinds of abuse, including persecution and loss of life.

This was the fate of many prophets in the Hebrew Testament and, in a special way, it was also the experience of Jesus. "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him" (Jn 1:11). To the degree that we fulfil our prophetic role in Church and society, we shall also share in this experience. On the other hand: If we enjoy the approval of those who are powerful and influential in Church and society, we have to ask ourselves if we have not neglected or even betrayed our prophetic task.



Francis of Assisi and His Movement

Historians emphasize that Francis of Assisi and his movement were the most important forces for renewal in the medieval Church. But how

are we to interpret this force? And what significance has it for those who claim Francis as their inspiration today?

The Prophetic Characteristic of Francis of Assisi

What Francis did was something that concerned the entire Church. The experience at San Damiano proves this. There the voice from the crucifix said: "Francis, go, repair my house, which, as you see, is falling completely to ruin" (2Cel 10). At first Francis takes this literally. He renovates three different church buildings. But what was

meant, and this he later recognized, was to rebuild the church on the foundations that Jesus had laid. Francis recognized very well, indeed, that his first task was to remind the Church of the Gospel and to live the priorities that were expressed therein. His fraternity was to be, therefore, an *ecclesiola*, a Church in miniature that



would be modelled according to the New Testament ideals. For him it was to be a radical return to a life according to the Gospel. He did not castigate the abuse, or indeed the irrelevance of the Church of his time. Clergy and hierarchy did not hear from him stinging condemnations. But Francis and his brothers were living witnesses, the expression of the innermost essence of the Church.

The echoes of the prophetic tradition were clear enough in this. They become even

clearer when one recalls that the Hebrew Testament prophets were often nomadic prophets with



Francis supports the Lateran Basilica.

no fixed abode, that Jesus and his disciples also lived this nomadic existence. Without possessions, wandering through the world, they preached repentance and conversion of heart, solidarity with the poor and those deprived of their rights. All these are essential characteristics, common to the biblical prophets as well as to Francis and his movement.

Francis does not take the Early Church to be the standard model. He goes further back to the nomadic way of life of Jesus and his disciples, or, to express it differently, to that

way of life that is described in the mission speeches of the Gospels (cf. Mt 10; Lk 9f.).

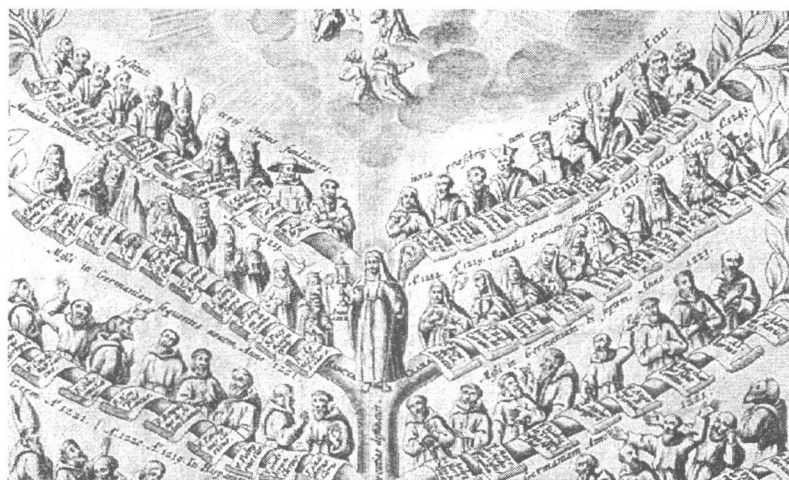
The Prophetic Characteristic of Clare of Assisi

7.2.

Clare and her sisters realized the life according to the Gospel in their own way at San Damiano. In the middle of a society which divided people into various classes according to wealth and origin, the community of San Damiano did not know such distinctions. One could call it the paradigm of a Church of brothers and sisters.

Free of the social constraints and traditions of the secular and monastic forms of life of their time, the community of San Damiano granted each sister the same dignity, at the same time showing a sensitive consideration for one another. Thus the community offered the possibility for a new kind of interpersonal relationships. A sign for these new relationships among them was their simple way of calling one another *sister*.

This was a new word in the language of convents in the 13th century. For Clare, as for Francis, it was fundamental that in their communities all regarded one another as brothers and sisters. The sisters of San Damiano are part of the groups of women who seek their place in a new social and ecclesial reality.



The Seraphic Tree.

A further sign of Clare's community is the new relationship to possessions. She asked the pope to grant her the *Privilege of Poverty*. It was customary for monasteries and convents to apply for papal privileges which mostly contained permission for retention or expansion of their possessions or power. In contrast to this, Clare asked that her community might live completely without possessions and thus she sets a prophetic sign. She fought a life-long battle with the popes for the realization of this privilege.



The Franciscan Movement Today: Is it Prophetic?

7.3

At the General Chapter in Madrid (1972), which was held following the Second Vatican Council, the Franciscans wrote a Document which states:

Francis received the Gospel of Jesus Christ in faith and was aware that he and his brothers were sent to the world to proclaim by life-style and word, conversion to the Gospel, to the coming of the Kingdom of God and the revelation of his love. His spiritual dynamism and urge for mobility sprang from his awareness of this mission (Madrid 1972, par.3).

The same document affirms the prophetic dimension of the Franciscan life:

Certainly, our life-style, to the extent that it is truly lived, is a powerful rebuttal of mediocrity and the weakness of individuals and structures (par.9).

The essential mission of our fraternity, its vocation to the Church and to the world consists in the lived reality of our life commitment. ...Our contribution to the building up of the Church and of humanity is first of all in this order: it is in our way of life that we bear witness (par.31).



A monk distributes "The Teachings of the Lord."

Church and Franciscan Sources

Scripture	Gen 4:1; Ex 19: 5-6; Lev 19:18; Num 6; Dt 6:5; 1Kgs 19; Is 8:18; 56:1-8; Jer 13; 16; 35; Ez 4f.; 12; 24; Hos 1:8; 4:4-6; 5:4; 11; Am 2:11; 5:4-5, 24; Mt 10; 13:57; 16:24; 21:12f.; 22:37-40; Lk 9; 10:1-16; Jn 1:11; 13:34; 15:17; Acts 2:42-47; Gal 3; Eph 2:14-16; Phil 3:10; Rev 2:4-7.
Documents of the Church	
Franciscan Sources	Test 14-15; 1Cel 18; 43; 2Cel 10; 61.
Inter-Franciscan Documents	
OFM, OFMCap, OFMConv	OFM: Madrid 1972
Poor Clares	
Third Order Regular	
Secular Franciscans	
Supplements	

(Note: The list of sources may be added to by the participants in the course)





Exercise

Describe the picture by Giotto reproduced below under the following aspect: Francis as a prophet.



After the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, rather the Almighty Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the prescriptions of the holy Gospel. And I had it written with few words and with simplicity and my Lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who came to assume this life, gave everything they had to the poor (Test 14).





Exercise

Read once again what was said in Section 7.3 of this Lesson Unit:

“The Franciscan Movement today – is it Prophetic?”

Assignment

Give examples of processes or events from the contemporary Franciscan Order which in your opinion display a prophetic dimension today.



Exercise

Read Jeremiah 13 and 16; Ezekiel 4f; 12; 24.

Questions

1. How did the prophets become signs?
2. In what images and with what symbolic actions do they challenge the people to conversion?



Exercise

Read the following report of Celano:

An instance where the table of Greccio was prepared on Easter day, and of how Francis showed himself a pilgrim after the example of Christ.

It happened one Easter that the brothers at the hermitage of Greccio prepared the table more carefully than they usually did with white linens and glass-ware. Coming down from his cell, the father came to

the table and saw that it was placed high and decorated extravagantly. But he did not smile at the smiling table. Stealthily and little by little he retraced his steps, put on the hat of a poor man who was there, and taking a staff in his hand, he went outside. He waited outside at the door until the brothers began to eat; for they were in the habit of not waiting for him



when he did not come at the signal. When they had begun to eat, this truly poor man cried out at the door: "For the love of the Lord God," he said, "give an alms to this poor, sick, wanderer!" The brothers answered, "Come in, man, for love of him you have invoked." He immediately entered and appeared before them as they were eating. But what astonishment, do you think, the beggar caused these inhabitants! The beggar was given a dish, and sitting alone, he put the dish in the ashes. "Now I am sitting as a Friar Minor should sit", he said. And to the brothers he said: "We should be moved by examples of poverty of the Son of God more than other religious. I

saw the table prepared and decorated, and I knew it was not the table of poor men who beg from door to door". This series of actions proves that he was like that other pilgrim who was in Jerusalem as the only stranger on that day. But he made the hearts of the disciples burn when he spoke to them (2Cel 61).

Question

What has the story to do with this Lesson Unit?

Applications

E



Application

Analyse the following text by A. von Speyr about the prophetic office:

God not only entrusted His elected ones with His mysteries. He gives them something of His Holiness. They receive a share of things that none can bear unless they are being led by God in the spirit of absolute obedience. They have given up making their own plans. They are people guided in the light of faith to proclaim and to initiate movements that they themselves do not fully comprehend. No external power, no striving towards a declared aim, no acquired knowledge can so change a person as the Word of God intimately experienced when the Holy Spirit gives the Triune witness of what the Father creates and promulgates and, in the Son sets the Foundations. Thus the prophet becomes a witness through the Spirit indwelling within. The prophets proclaim happenings and realities that possess inner validity and truth for today only when viewed from God's transcendency, beyond time and its confines.

And the prophet stammers with prophetic voice, stern and assured, or what is proclaimed with deeds, unbending and uncompromising, the prophet does not fully understand in the last analysis, because it is and remains a gratuitous gift of God... Prophets cannot help proclaiming the truth, even if they struggle against doing so, because God, Who is guiding, is greater than their human thoughts, greater than their human will, greater even than their own indispensability. God's requirements outweigh man's requirements. The prophet proclaims as one who is totally subjected to the power of God. But, at the same time, as one elected and privileged to gaze upon the almighty Father (Adrienne of Speyr).

Questions

1. What are the chief characteristics of genuine prophecy described in this text?
2. Do they correspond with what is said in the lesson unit?



2.



Application

Johann Baptist Metz:

"Religious orders are a kind of 'shock therapy' administered by the Holy Spirit to the whole Church."

Assignment

What do you think about this statement?

3.



Application

A few examples of prophetic action in the present time:

- In Brazil, Cardinal Lorscheider sat on the roof of a poor hovel that was to be demolished by the police on the instruction of rich landowners. He wanted to defend the rights of the poor.
- In the USA, the Berrigan brothers burned draft papers with napalm in order to protest against the use of napalm in the war in Vietnam.

- In India, Mahatma Gandhi organized a march to the sea in order to break the British salt monopoly and to demand the independence of India.

Assignments

1. Look for further examples of prophetic people in our times who have called for a change through symbolic action.
2. Consider your own opinion of such acts and whether you would be capable of the same.

4.



Application

From the Fioretti of the Poor Nuns of Rwanda:

Some of the sisters, who were Tutsis, were being persecuted. They knew that the soldiers of the militia would kill them. Sisters from the ethnic group of the Hutu tried to protect them with all their sisterly love and were ready to offer their own lives for them. They hid them and stood watch. The soldiers of the militia

searched for them several times, but didn't find them. With time it became more and more difficult to escape the death squads. So they fled to another place but there they were soon again in danger. The house was surrounded by soldiers who had come to rob and to kill. The sisters were very afraid. One of them however took courage, went out to the soldiers and addressed them:



"Brothers, certainly you are very tired."
 "Who are you? You have certainly hidden enemies."
 "We are the Poor Clares and come from Kamonyi.
 We are here to pray, even for you."
 "You pray?"
 "Yes, we invite you to pray with us."

And she offered them rosaries. One of the soldiers said that he would like to accept one. Then others came.

The sister gave each a rosary with the words that she hoped there would soon be peace. The soldiers left them, visibly impressed and harmed no one. They had to flee again. All over they found good people who offered them shelter. Wherever they were, they sought to maintain their conventual life and took

turns praying. They raised up other people whom they encountered and courageously took their part. Many people struck their breasts and said, "If all religious were like these women, the horrible evil in our land would not have been allowed to happen."

Questions

1. In what manner can this mode of action be called prophetic?
2. How does one get into a prophetic role?
3. How would you explain the reaction of the soldiers and the other people?

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- p. 5** Floorpainting, ca. 1500, Cathedral of Siena/Italy.
- p. 6** **Top:** Giotto, ca. 1300, Upper Church of S. Francesco, Assisi
- p. 7** Tomb inscription, 1st century, Archaeological Museum of Aquileia/Italy.
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- p. 14** Psalter Illustration of Canterbury, 13th century, detail, National Library Paris.
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