

Go,
Rebuild
My Church!

**Comprehensive
Course on the
Franciscan
Mission
Charism**



The
Permanent Role
of Franciscans
in the Church

Lesson Unit 25

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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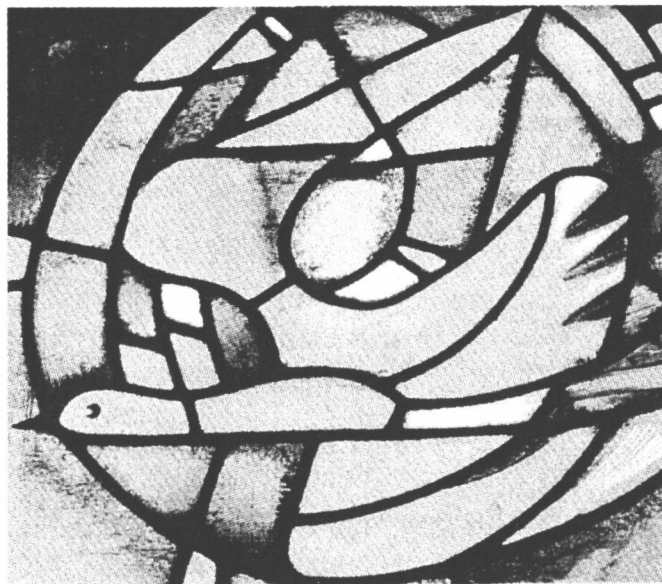


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Go, Rebuild My Church!

*A Comprehensive
Course on the
Franciscan Mission
Charism*



The Permanent Role of Franciscans in the Church



Lesson Unit 25



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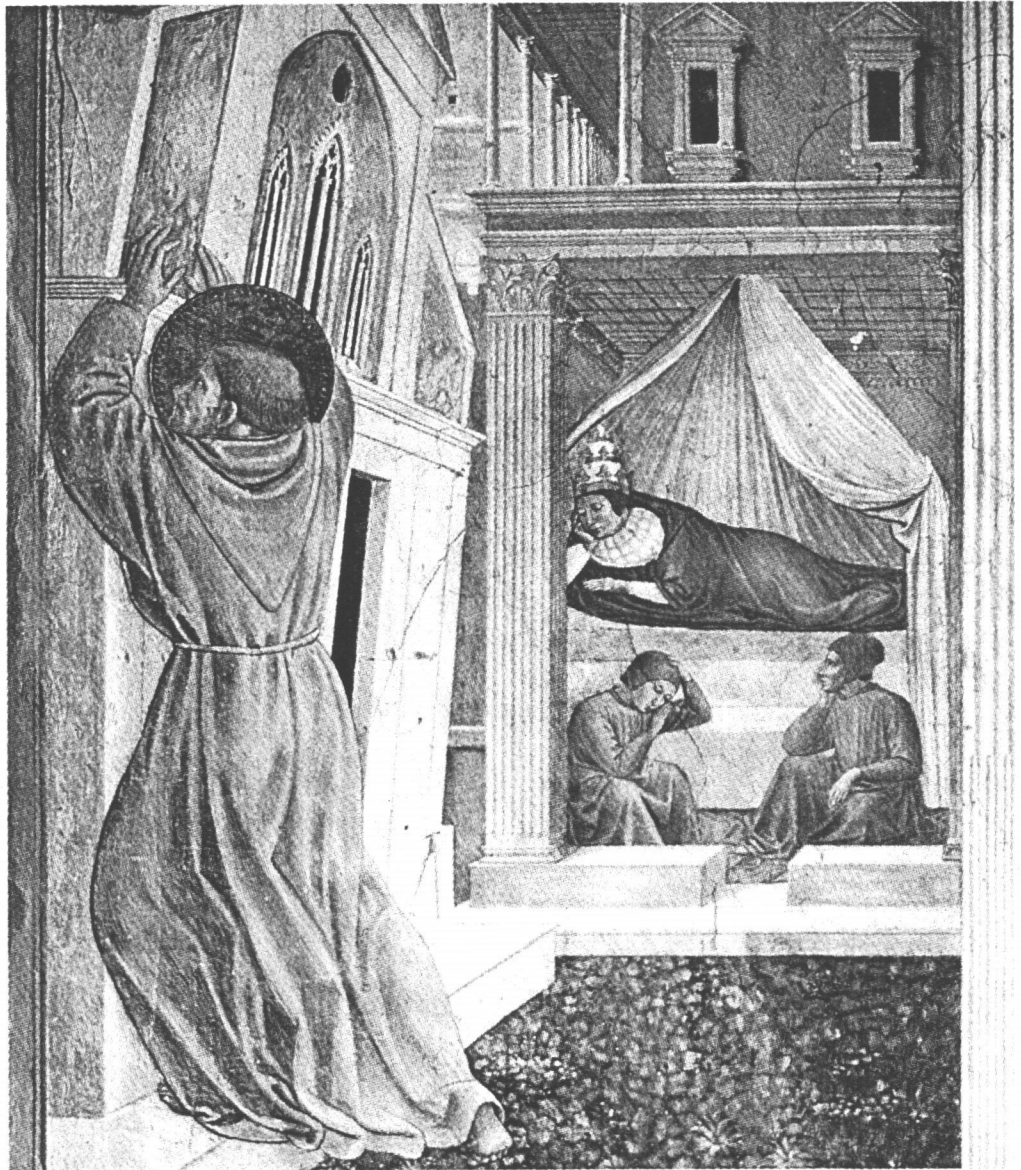


he Pope had a Dream

Pope Innocent III once had a dream in which he saw the church about to collapse. He watched helplessly as the walls were about to give way and fall; the sanctu-

ary was desecrated, exposed to all the destructive forces. Faith disappeared, hope decreased, love fled from the Church...

...But suddenly a poor man in shabby clothes appeared. He put his shoulders against the falling walls and with all his might prevented the church from collapsing. Stones that had already fallen to the ground moved back into place, the roof covered the church once more, giving protection to all that is good. Faith, hope and love were growing again in the Church and people became reconciled. On the day after the dream the Pope received an unexpected visitor. When Francis entered the hall, the Pope recognised him as the shabby man whom he had seen in his dream, the beggar who renewed the Church (according to LMj III:10).





Building the Church

"Go and rebuild my church" this is the permanent task the Franciscan family has to fulfil in the footsteps of St. Francis. In his *First Life of St. Francis* Thomas of Celano develops in those paragraphs that record the story of Francis' calling a whole "theology of building the church" (cf. 1C 18). In like manner, Clare of Assisi situated her community within the same Church structure (cf. graph in Lesson 19:2.4).

Today, the churches are becoming empty in many countries in the northern hemisphere and the religious Orders have only few vocations. The Church has remarkably lost its relevance in the life of individuals as well as in the shaping of social life. The countries that used to be the human and material sources of Christian mission have become mission lands themselves (cf. Lesson 14).

The situation is quite different in the southern countries of the world. There the Church has rather gained more influence. Nobel Peace prize awardees and human rights advocates like Bishop Tutu of South Africa, Bishop Belo of East Timor and Cardinal Arns of Brazil are symbols shaping a prophetic Church. Many brothers and sisters advocate the option for the poor (cf. Lesson 19). The Latin American Church took a stance on the side of the poor in Medellin, Puebla, and Santo Domingo and, consequently, renewed the prophetic role of the Church dramatically.

The Franciscan family which is spread throughout the Northern and the Southern parts of the world, must continue to reflect on the mission it received from

the Cross in San Damiano. It has to fulfil its task of rebuilding the house of Christ. That is: It must build on the foundation that Christ himself has laid. In doing so, the Franciscan family itself must be the kind of Church that Jesus envisioned, not with an attitude of self-sufficiency, but helping

- to assist the Church in becoming more Church, the Franciscan family must continuously be a reform movement within the Church;
- to help people find protection and a home under the roof of the Church.

The Church is born of the evangelising activity of Jesus and the Twelve. She is the normal, desired, most immediate and most visible fruit of this activity... Having been born of such a mission the Church in her turn is sent by Jesus. The Church remains in the world as a sign - simultaneously obscure and luminous - of a new presence of Jesus, of his departure and of his permanent presence. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear



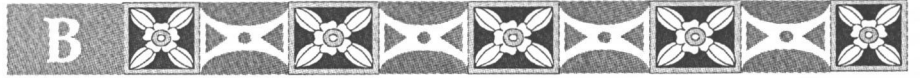
"Save your people, Lord! Bless your heritage! Shepherd them; carry them for ever!" (Ps 28:9)



the proclamation of "the mighty works of God" which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by Him and reunited. In brief, this means that she has a constant need of being evangelised, if she wishes to retain freshness, vigour and

strength in order to proclaim the Gospel. The second Vatican Council recalled and the 1974 Synod vigorously took up again this theme of the Church which is evangelised by constant conversion and renewal, in order to evangelise the world with credibility (EN 15).

Survey



Opening New Ways

This lesson is composed of two parts. The first part reflects on some aspects of the Church: that the Church herself is in constant need of conversion and, therefore, must be evangelised herself. From its origin the Franciscan movement has a special meaning in this regard. First, it will be shown that one must distinguish between active listening and subservient subjection: allegiance to the Church is absolutely compatible with walking new ways, with imagination and initiative. It is about risking new impulses and directions in the Church on her way through history, but in a way that the unity of the Church is not destroyed.

This shows already that the original calling of the Franciscans does not lie in an ecclesial office but in the prophetic charism towards which a greater sensitivity would be necessary, above all on the part of those who hold an office in the Church. In addition to this sensitivity love must be the guiding principle that moves one to reach out to others, especially to those who are outside the Church. Persuasion by giving reasons is demanded – an approach that is more convincing than any form of violence.

In the second part of this lesson unit, some criteria for the "discernment of spirits" will be discussed. One objective criterion is the Gospel itself. A second one focuses more on the intention: love as the chief motive of action. A third criterion is more personal: commitment to a life

on the side of the poor. The fourth is a missionary concern: to cross the boundaries in order to seek out and encounter those who are alienated from the Church.



Love must be the guiding principle that moves one to reach out to others.





Conversion in the Church



"Francis, do you not see that my house is falling into ruin? Go, and repair it for me" (L3C 13). In the whole history of the Church, rarely if ever, has there been a call to mission so clearly defined as this call heard by Francis of Assisi. This is a mission of great importance: the call is a demand for growth and change from within the Church itself. This means: the Franciscan Family has to

be understood as a renewal movement *within* the Church. This is the charism of the Franciscan family!

The Early Sources fascinate us with reports on this movement for renewal. They show what can happen when people allow themselves to be evangelised within the Church.

Active listening instead of subservience



First of all it must be pointed out that Francis opposed all attempts to impose on him a traditional form of life. He follows the calling that comes directly from God, a completely new beginning. He writes:

When God gave me some friars, there was no one to tell me what I should do; but the Most High Himself made it clear to me that I must live the life of the Gospel. I had this written down briefly and simply and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me (Test 14).

Therefore it is not a far-fetched dream when we hope that Christians will again and again start new impulses and movements in the Church and in doing so carry the Church along into an ongoing process of conversion. Evangelization might well be simpler at times, if those in positions of authority in the Church will show greater confidence in the working of the Holy Spirit within the faithful. We hear this message loud and clear in *Ad Gentes*:

In various manners the Holy Spirit awakens the missionary spirit in the Church. It is not seldom that He precedes the action of those who are charged to lead the life of the Church (AG 28).



Francis went to the Pope to have his new way of life confirmed and approved.

Obedience to church authorities must, of necessity, first correspond to obedience to the Spirit of God and must never become blind subservi-



ence. Otherwise life would stagnate and the Gospel would lose its vitality. On the other hand, no one may raise his individual insights and experiences to the rank of absolutes. Francis

went to the Pope to have his new way of life confirmed and approved, not to receive it (1C 32). Yet, this approval was important to him, because he wanted to live in unity with the Church.

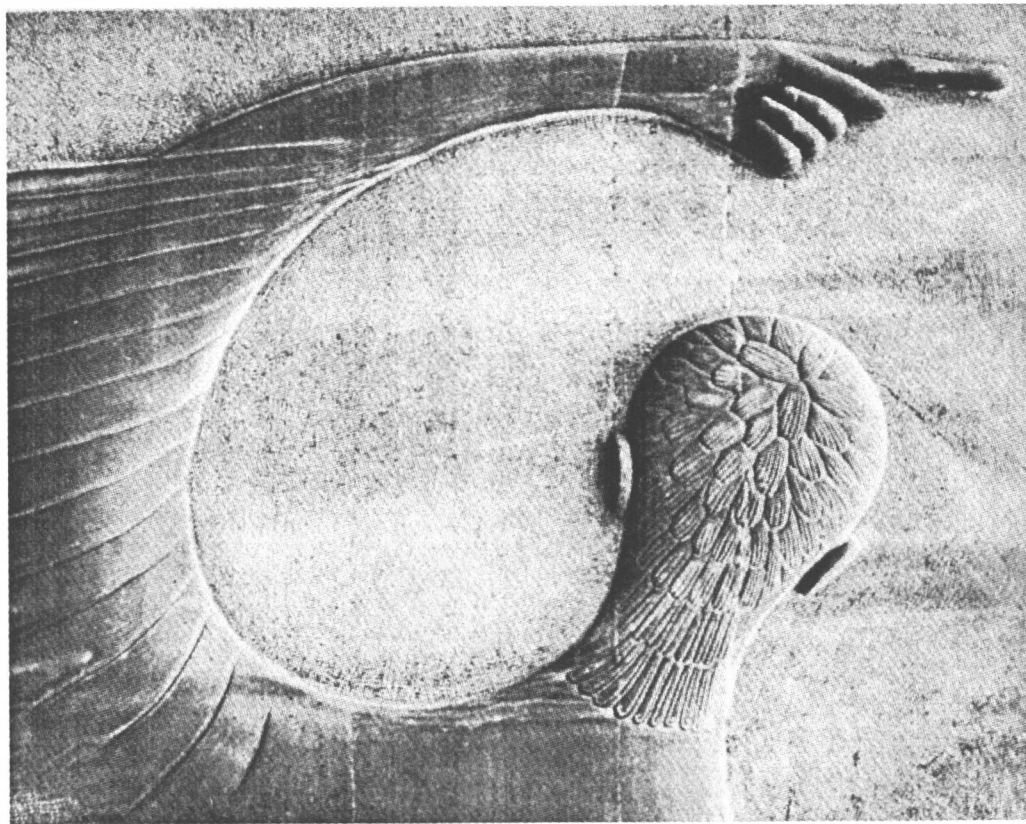
Charism instead of power

1.2.

The courage of Francis to create new ways of preaching the Faith springs from his charismatic conviction: *"The Most High Himself made it clear to me..."* (Test 14) He experienced in his own person the power and the workings of the Holy Spirit. Despite and because of these gifts, Francis did not feel superior towards the Church and towards his friars. He did not use his charism for claims of spiritual power. On the contrary, he invited every friar to be aware of his own individual charism (e.g. Brother Leo). This respect for the working of the Holy Spirit in every brother left its imprint also on the Rule he wrote for the brothers. He developed a most sensitive insight into the workings

of the Spirit in discerning the missionary vocation of a brother (LR 12) or on the question of a religious vocation in general (ER 2; 16; LegCl 3).

In case of conflict, Francis brought the judgement of the friars in authority to the judgement of all the friars assembled in the Chapter. The General Chapter of all the friars is the highest authority in the Order. The introduction of such a democratic structure into the Church of the 13th Century was revolutionary. Francis rediscovered the Christian rule of life, because he was conscious of the workings of the Holy Spirit in every friar. He wanted to create new structures that would respond to the workings of the Holy Spirit, who was for him the General Minister of the Order (cf. 2C 193).



"The Most High Himself revealed to me..." (Test 14).

Francis did not use the Gospel to lord it over others. Due to the workings of the Holy Spirit Francis respected all people. Had the Church in her mission and pastoral ministry paid more attention to the mission principles of St. Francis, it would probably have been spared most of the conflicts related to mission and pastoral activities in the course of history. The same can be said of the Franciscan family and of the missionary activity of its members.



Love instead of condemnation

1.3.

In *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* we find the story of the three robbers who were chased away by the guardian of the house. Francis took the guardian severely to task for this action, as expressed in the following lines:

So, since you acted against charity and against the example of Jesus Christ, I order you under holy obedience to take right now this sack of bread and jug of wine which I begged. Go and look carefully for those robbers over the mountains and valleys until you find them. And offer them all this bread and this wine for me. And then kneel down before them and humbly accuse yourself of your sin of cruelty. And then ask them in my name not to do those evil things anymore, but to fear God, and not to offend their neighbours. And if they do so, I promise them that I will supply them with provisions for their needs and I will give them food and drink all the time (LFI 26).

The theme of this story had already become a Franciscan principle encoded in the Rule: "Everyone who comes to them, friends or foes, thief or robber, must be made welcome" (ER 7:14).

No doubt this principle has something to do with Francis' concept of poverty: whoever has no possessions cannot turn his back on others. However, over and above the poverty concept, Francis' behaviour is a proof of the fundamental goodness of the heart that embraces all humanity and discovers, even in guilt and wrong



behaviour, the human person who needs nothing more than loving kindness.

Here, one cannot help to be reminded of the parable of the "Lost Sheep". More than anybody else, the outcast, who is not integrated into society, is the person who needs special attention and love, not condemnation.

Communication instead of crushing blows

1.4.

The episode of Francis' encounter with the Sultan strikingly shows what can happen when one allows oneself to be guided by the Spirit of the Gospel. While with the blessing of the Church the crusading army was fighting against the army of the Sultan, Francis, without force of arms, broke through the opposing front lines. He went to the Sultan on foot and spoke to him. In his *History of the Orient* Jacques de Vitry, who

accompanied the crusaders' army, gave an account of this incident:

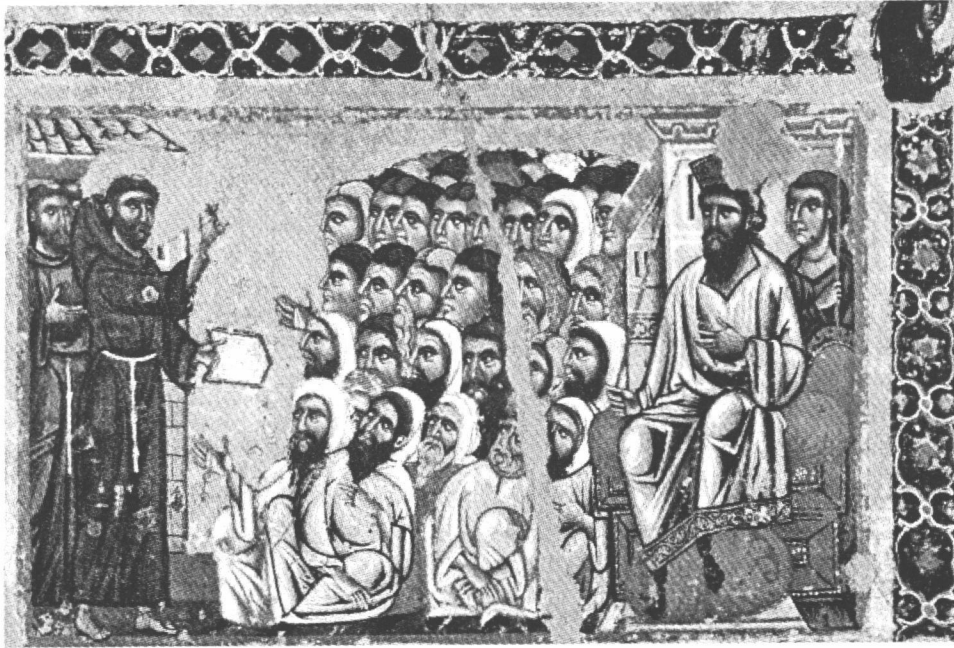
We have seen the founder and the master of this Order...he was a simple unlettered man, beloved by God and men; he was called Brother Francis. Spiritual fervour and ecstasy moved him to such excesses that, having arrived at the army of the Christians before Damietta in Egypt, with no fear whatsoever, fortified solely with the 'shield of faith', he set out for the



camp of the Sultan of Egypt. When the Saracens took him prisoner, he said: "I am a Christian! Lead me to

your lord!" (History of the Orient, ch. 32).

A sure sign of the genuineness of a missionary conviction is manifested



St. Francis before the Sultan of Egypt.

when fronts and barriers fall. Fronts exist to defend deeply held convictions and/or membership in certain social classes. Whoever breaks down such barriers continues what Jesus began by His Incarnation, when he broke through the boundary between the Godhead and humanity. Francis' approach to the Sultan in the Middle Ages was politically more explosive than the statements of Latin American representatives of Liberation Theology today.



Discernment of Spirits: Franciscan criteria of evangelization

The central declaration of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* reads as follows:

It is always necessary for the Church to be herself evangelised if she wants to preserve her life, her vitality and her strength in order to be able to preach the Gospel (EN 15).

Obviously this message has not yet been recognised by many members of the hierarchical church as well as by lay people. The life of Francis shows how the Spirit of God and the power of the Gospel can change a person and through that person even the whole Church.

Hence the mission of Franciscans within the Church does not consist only in defending



the Christian faith from outside foes, but it is more strongly directed against dangers from within. The brothers and sisters must allow themselves to be challenged ever anew by the claims of the Gospel and seek a new form of life, (= "forma vitae"). In doing so, they will come against pastoral and theological hardened strongholds that formed in a Church in danger of succumbing to bourgeois tendencies. In such situations a conflict with those who hold office in the Church can hardly be avoided. The following are some criteria that facilitate the discernment of spirits.



The Gospel as the first criterion

2.1.

Francis' fundamental loyalty to the Church is beyond doubt. His writings bear witness to this fact. What he wrote about "true faith," the respect and honour due to the sacraments, his respectful behaviour towards priests and theologians, his respect for diocesan bishops and the rules he wrote concerning obedience to the Cardinal Protector of the Order, all bear witness to that. It was this loyalty which enabled him to get his ideals approved by the Roman authorities.

The Saint of Assisi, however, can in no way be called "a man of the Church", if this label designates someone who is content with conforming to existing conditions and whose chief task would be to ensure the smoothest possible procedure. In fact, Francis did not place his Order directly at the service of the ecclesiastical institution as other founders of religious orders often did. To be sure, Francis warned his brothers explicitly against the danger of straying into heresy or moving outside the Church (2LtF; LtOrd; Test 6). But without denying dogma, liturgy or the organisational structures of the Church, Francis concentrated his whole energy in proclaiming to all a new religious-ethical message, a new way of life according to the Gospel. At least such was the impact he made on his contemporaries. He rejected all attempts to divide the Good News into legal regulations, ordinances or prescriptions. He also strictly forbade his brothers to annotate, gloss or provide further comments on the Rule.

The self-assurance with which Francis approached all persons in ecclesiastical authority from the Pope downward, while fighting for the approval of this new form of life, sprang from his firm determination to want nothing but to live according to the Gospel. It is the same Gospel to which the Church and its hierarchy were bound just as firmly. Francis proved to them that one can really live according to the Gospel. We find this conviction spelled out in his Rule:

The Rule and Life of the Friars Minor is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without property, and in chastity (LR 1).



Every new generation of Franciscan women and men is given the freedom and the task to use their lives in order to prove to their own age that the Gospel can be lived. This calls for initiative, for creativity to improvise and for courage to break out of established customs. It is in harmony with the original Franciscan spirit to renew the concrete ways of life and make the Gospel message more effective in the face of new situations and realities.

The main criterion for the life and work of the Franciscan brothers and sisters in the Church is the practice of Jesus, His Incarnation, His life and work, His death and resurrection. It is not a matter of re-formulating the content of the Bible, dogmas and traditional moral codes. The main task of the brothers and sisters of Francis consists in living the Gospel and making it relevant for the people. The whole course on the Franciscan Mission Charism is intended to show what this means today. It means to live the Gospel in the midst of today's problem areas, to be Church, to approach people and the world in the spirit of Jesus.



The aim of all missionary activity is the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole world. This task has been entrusted to the whole Church. In the Vatican II *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* the Church defines herself as follows:

According to its nature, the Church is missionary. It is sent forth as an envoy, because it derives its origin from the mission of the Son Himself and from the mission of the Holy Spirit, according to the plan of the Father. This plan arises from the source of all love, the Will of the Father (Ad Gentes 2).



Every pastoral relationship must be rooted in the love of God.

The Gospel is full of examples of Jesus' actions that manifest God's love for His people. What matters to him is not so much doctrine but actions. Jesus makes this clear in his parables, among others in the parable of the "Good Samaritan" who cares for the sufferer in a very concrete way. Jesus presents the Samaritan to his contemporary audience as a shining example of virtue, despite the fact that he does not belong to the people of Israel and as a Samaritan is an outsider, alien to the Jewish culture and religion. On the other

hand, the priest and the Levite, referred to in the same parable, deny by their behaviour the principles of their faith and of the temple rites, that is, the unity of love of God and love of neighbour.

Conforming with Church doctrines alone, and even passing them on intact to the next generation, does not fulfil all the criteria of a life lived according to the Gospel. The Gospel is life. Whoever restricts himself to merely teaching it, yet denies it in his behaviour, is driving out religion by religion. Up to now, we who pride ourselves on belonging to the Church, have not yet really learnt how to live according to the Gospel. In fact, this happens only in our encounter with people and relating to them as Jesus has shown us by his example.

For Jesus the quality of his relationship with people was synonymous with His relationship with the Father:

To them I have revealed your name, and I will continue to reveal it so that your love for me may live in them, and I may live in them (Jn 17:26).

Every pastoral relationship must be rooted in the love of God. Jesus can be present only when the love which bound him to the Father is manifested in the lives of those who confess his Name. When Jesus was about to confer the supreme pastoral mission on Peter, he solemnly asked him three times: "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" (Jn 21:15-17). This statement clearly shows the kind and quality of relationship that should distinguish those who hold an office in the Church, the pastors who are in charge of the faithful. If we turn the sentence round, then Jesus says to Peter: "If you don't love me, then keep your hands off the pastoral ministry to people."

The proclamation of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, therefore, must spring forth from a deeply rooted spiritual process of interaction: Jesus transfers to humanity the love he has for his Father. In his loving contact with every human being, Jesus counts on the human ability to love that God has given to humanity. It is part of the human nature created in God's image and likeness.

The human person has the freedom to choose an



existence outside God's plan. He/she can rebel against the innate capacity to love. However, Scripture is full of stories of people who found their true selves through their encounter with Jesus and their relationship with him. For Jesus gives back to people their freedom and enables them to love and accept God and others. Jesus effects this change less by instruction about God's love and more by lovingly relating with them.

In obedience to the Father, Jesus did not abandon his attitude of loving kindness in the midst of rejection, disbelief and deadly threats. Thus, people recognised God's love in His deeds, overcame their egotism and submitted themselves lovingly to the Will of God. The experience of Jesus' love for them helped the first generation of Christians come to this conclusion: "God is love, and whoever remains in love, remains in God and God in him" (1 Jn 14:16).

This is not a logical deduction, but a theological and existential interpretation of the way Jesus acted. An example in Scriptures may help clarify this statement.

Jesus does not pass Zaccheus by who is perched on a tree to see Jesus better. He stops and enters the house of the taxcollector. This encounter moves Zaccheus so much that he starts to distribute his wealth. Jesus comments: "Today salvation is come to this house because this is what it means to be a son of Abraham" (Lk 19:9). The following reflections may help to explain further this particular episode in the salvific mission of Jesus:

What has happened? Our customary theological distinctions are strangely worthless here. What did Jesus do? Was it service to the world or an act of salvation? Did he ask for a bed for the night in His capacity as the chief Shepherd, the main Priest, the Rabbi? Is it to be attributed to His Divine or to His Human Nature that in the end all are happy? Where does this radical change that took place in Zaccheus' heart come from? According to Holy Scriptures everything that



"The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is

happened was the effect of one single moment, i.e., when Jesus looked Zaccheus in the eye. Jesus gave him back his self-respect, his dignity and his reputation. From that moment onward, Zaccheus was capable of changing.

But not every kind of contact from person to person makes people more human and more humane. There are forms of human encounter that destroy the human person in its integrity. This may happen in a nursery, in schools, in bedrooms, in prisons, in torture chambers. A human personality can only develop when both parties respect and accept each other mutually and unconditionally... What is, therefore, characteristic of Jesus' way of encountering people? He is the One Who brings God to others, who enables them to become God's image, i.e., to be good to others as God is good to them (R.Zerfass).

In this whole story, Jesus did not refer directly to God, nor did he mention conversion. He simply invites himself to Zaccheus' house, against all good customs and valid laws of the pious people.

(Jesus) claims God for Zaccheus, in protest against and in marked contrast to the pious people of Jericho. This is the Christian way of acting: To promise God to people, although everything seems to speak against it (R.Zerfass).



Whoever reads this story today knows that Jesus wanted to say to Zaccheus: "Don't give up! You too are a son of Abraham, God loves you."

Many pastoral activities today seem fruitless and doomed to failure because many have the impression that God is being invoked against people and not in favour of them.

We can deduce some valid conclusions from these salvific events recounted in the New Testament. These are of fundamental importance for pastoral work in every age. Just as Jesus acted out of love for the Father and made the pastoral mandate of Peter dependent on his love for Him, so too every pastoral activity must be rooted in the Good News of the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. A pastoral activity may not be carried out in one's own name. Whenever we pursue our own objectives, rely on ourselves and do not take God's love into account, we are acting in our own name. However, we are acting in the name of Jesus, when we reckon with the powers that are released when people experience God's love in concrete relationships, and when they are able to believe again in their capacity to love.

In the time of Francis and Clare, the Church often acted out of interests that had nothing to do with the Gospel. In their reactions to this, Francis and Clare were especially concerned that their acting was in agreement with the love of Jesus. This is the central mission of the brothers and sisters to this very day.

Life with the poor

2.3.

At this point the poor need to be given special attention. The Gospels, especially St. Luke, describe, on almost every page, Jesus' attitude towards the poor. In doing so the Evangelists make it very plain that God is the God of the poor. One of Francis' and Clare's marked characteristics is their identification with the poor. They counted themselves among the poor and wanted to live among the outcasts of their time.

Since this topic is dealt with in more detail in lesson unit 19, it will not be further developed here. Instead, our attention will focus on one particular aspect: Jesus gives his special attention to those people whose capacity to love is threatened. These



are marginalized people and children whose basic capacity to love can be hurt or irreparably destroyed. People who are so endangered are the priority groups for pastoral commitment.

To Jesus no person is to be excluded from his community because of religious reasons, like ritual restrictions or because he or she is, in the eyes of people, "not fit to approach God." Luke tells us that: "It is not the healthy who need the physician, but the sick" (Lk 5:31).

Jesus uttered His severest condemnation against people who destroy in children their innate ability to love and to trust: "Whoever scandalises one



of these little ones who believe in me, it were better for him to be cast into the sea with a millstone around his neck" (Mt 18:6).

When his disciples asked Jesus "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" he answered that one has to become like a child. Who renounces greatness, strength and power "is the Greatest in

the Kingdom of God." Jesus places the children and the disciples on the same level. "Whoever welcomes one such child for my sake welcomes me (Mt 18:5).

Who, as a Christian, through a decision for non-violence, makes himself vulnerable, and like Francis "faces the Sultan defenceless" has the Gospel on his side.

The problem of the unchurched

2.4.

Everywhere the Church is faced with the task of "primary evangelization" That individual people do not go to church and no longer recognise the Church as a relevant authority, is nothing new. However, what is new is the fact that nowadays large groups that are even a majority in society, live outside the church. This situation has already been described as "the post-Christian era." This situation calls for people, who are willing to cross beyond the accepted boundaries of the Church, to open totally new paths of pastoral and apostolic service (cf. Lesson 1). In many traditionally Christian countries there is already a considerable percentage of people who call themselves "without religion". Others understand themselves as Christians, but they no longer feel at home with the official Church or do not belong anymore to a church ("unchurched people"). At the same time there are others who never belonged to any church, but understand themselves as following Christ ("churchless Christianity"). This is the case especially in Japan, where, according to statistics, ca. 1.6% of the population call themselves Christians, while only 0.8% are baptised Christians.

In the face of this situation are those who invoke Francis as their spiritual leader not especially challenged to search for new paths of evangelization? For Francis wanted to reach out to exactly such people who could not be reached anymore by the traditional sermon. He appealed to them by means of his *exhortatio*, his call to penance.

There are differences between a regular sermon and an *exhortation*.

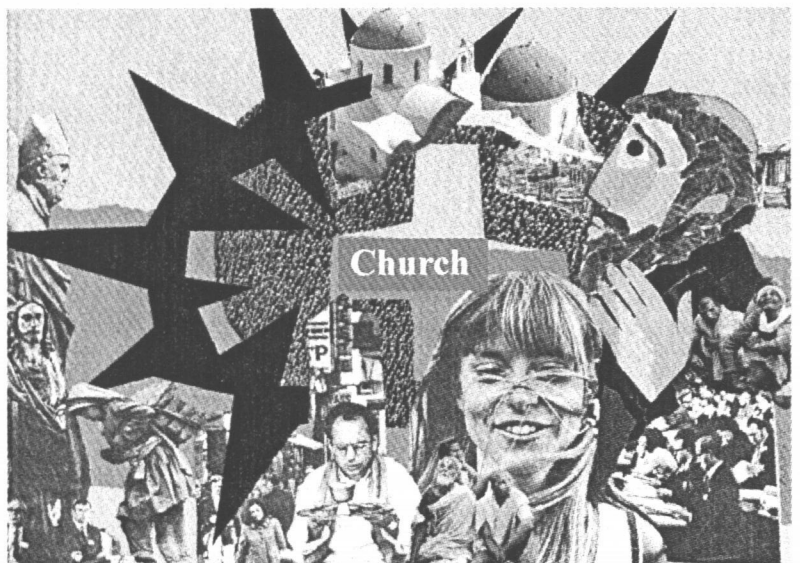
- The sermon was generally held within a church building, while the ex-

hortation was delivered in the open, in squares, and in the streets.

- The sermon presented dogmatic expositions, while the exhortation was directed towards practical things and experiences of everyday life.

- The sermon had to follow exactly certain academic principles that were developed in schools, while the exhortation was guided by a spontaneous heartfelt impulse, expressing itself in popular forms that appealed to the people. Often it took the form of a song or chant.

In short, the exhortation deals with a method that is appropriate for the unchurched people. Furthermore, if the people will not come to the Church, then the Church will have to go to the people! For this purpose the Church will have to employ all the ingenuity and creative imagination that it can muster to reach out to people. Francis seems to be telling us again: "I have done what is mine to do. May Christ teach you what you are to do" (2C 214).



Church Documents and Franciscan Sources

Scripture	Mt 18:1-6; Lk 5:31; 19:9; Jn 17:26; 21:15; 21:5 ff.; 1 Cor 12,1-30; 1 Jn 4:16.
Church Documents	Ad Gentes 2; 28; EN 6.
Franciscan Sources	2LtF 32f; LtOrd 44; ER 2:1; 7:14; 16:3; LR 1:1; 12; Test 6 ff.; 14f.; 1C 18f.;32; 2C 193; 214; 3S 13; LMj III:10; LFI 26; LegCl 1.
Inter-Franciscan Documents	
OFM, OFMCap, OFMConv	
Poor Clares	
Third Order Regular	
Secular Franciscans	
Other supplements	

(Each community may add other items)

Exercises



Exercise

Thomas of Celano describes how Francis built a house for God in San Damiano. He speaks allegorically of it: Here *“The Lady Clare, a native of the city of Assisi, the most precious of the firmest stone of the whole structure, was the foundation”* (1C 18).

Read the following two paragraphs from Celano:

1C 19: *Over her arose a noble structure of most precious pearls, whose pr arise is not from men but from God, since neither is our limited understanding sufficient to imagine it, nor our scanty vocabulary to utter it. For above everything else there flourishes among them that excelling virtue of mutual and continual charity, which so binds their wills into one, that though forty or fifty of them dwell together in one place, agreement in likes and dislikes moulds one spirit in them out of many. Secondly, in each one there glows the gem of humility, which so preserves the gifts of good things bestowed from heaven, that they merit other virtues too. Thirdly, the lily of vir-*

ginity and chastity so sprinkles them with a wondrous odour that , forgetful of earthly thoughts, they desire to meditate only on heavenly things; and so great a love for their eternal Spouse arises in their hearts from the fragrance of that lily that the integrity of that holy affection excludes from them every habit of their former life. Fourthly, they have all become so conspicuous by the title of the highest poverty that their food and clothing hardly at all or never come together to satisfy extreme necessity.

1C 20: *Fifthly, they have so attained the singular grace of abstinence and silence that they need exert hardly any effort to check the movements of the flesh and to restrain their tongues; some of them have become so unaccustomed to speak that when necessity demands that they speak, they can hardly remember how to form the words as they should. Sixthly, with all these things, they are adorned so admirably with the virtue of patience, that no adversity of tribulations or injury of*



vexations ever breaks their spirit or changes it. Seventhly, and finally, they have so merited the height of contemplation that in it they learn everything they should do or avoid; and happily they know how to be out of mind for God, persevering night and day in praising him and in praying to him. May the eternal God deign by his holy grace to bring so holy a beginning to an even more holy end.

Questions

1. Which of these foundation stones, used by the Poor Clares, have permanent value and lasting worth to the Universal Church?
2. In your opinion, what new additional elements would be important today to guarantee the existence of living communities in the Church?



Exercise

Read 1 Cor 12:1-30.

2.

Tasks and Questions

1. List the ministries existing in the Church of Corinth in St. Paul's time and try to find the names of the corresponding ministries in the Church today.
2. Which of these ministries do not exist in your parish/community?
3. Do you know of any other ministries found in your parish or community today?
4. Which is the most important ministry among all those existing in your parish/community?



Exercise

The lesson unit ends with the following statement: *"If the people do not go to Church then the Church has to go to the people."*

3.

Questions and Tasks

1. Where have you met "unchurched people" in society, in the Church, in your Order?
2. What kind of people are they?
3. Do you know any pastoral programmes that could do justice to them? Which?
4. Try to design such a pastoral program, if possible in a group.





Application

Read the following text dealing with three models of Church communities:

- **The Communio Model**

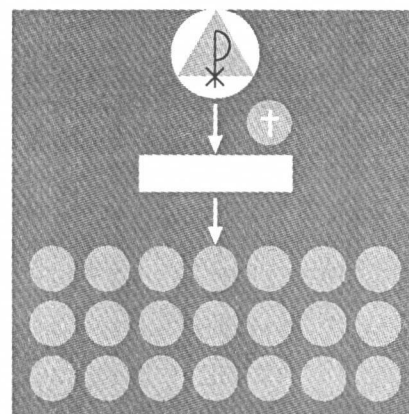
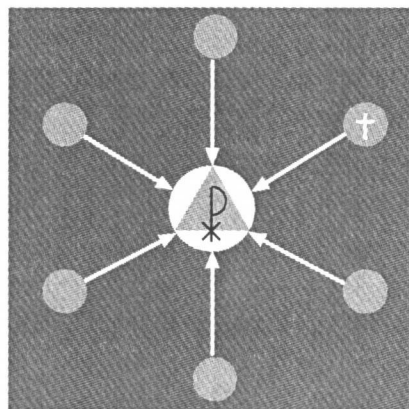
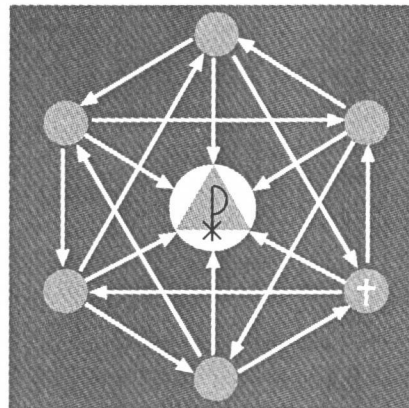
The person who has a mature prayer-life is a listener. He/she takes the shared prayers of others into account and knows how to share his/her own prayers and hymns at the right moment so that they can contribute something to the themes of the others or develop them further. Thus, peace is established as Paul also demanded for his community in Corinth (1Cor 14:40; cf. 14:33).

- **The Individualistic Model**

If a Christian community is still at the beginning and the majority of the faithful have not yet taken the step of making a life commitment to Christ, or have not yet learnt to really trust the Holy Spirit, I would rather call their liturgy a spontaneous one but not charismatic. For such a service the members have often no contact with each other in prayer. Each one prays for himself whatever seems right to him at the moment. There is not yet an awareness of the fact that the Spirit of God is also praying in the others. So, one does not pay much attention to the prayers of the others. Each one turns directly to the centre.

- **The Hierarchical Model**

In the traditional Parish Mass, the priest is assigned a special role above the people. He faces the congregation. He is the spokesman of the community, while the individual faithful can do no more than pray in silence or join in the prescribed rites and liturgical prayers. The members are not explicitly related in prayer among each other (Rotzetter, OFM Cap).



Questions

1. Where have you experienced these three models of Church community as depicted above?
2. Which of the three models do you experience most often? Explain!
3. Which of the three models would answer best your own spiritual needs and which one would meet best the pastoral needs of the people around you?



Application

Franciscan fidelity to Rome and prophetic criticism:

It is a special characteristic of St. Francis that he wanted to live his new life in the Church and with the Church. Therefore he felt great love and reverence towards the Pope. However, there have been many occasions in his life, when he could not accept the decrees of the Roman Church. The clearest example is his public disapproval of the fifth Crusade (1217-1221) that had been organised under Pope Honorius III. This crusade was not compatible with the spirit of the Gospel that Francis had made his Rule of Life.

Fidelity towards the Church does not dispense us from the burdensome duty to compare her concrete actions with the spirit of the Gospel. This is the prophetic task especially of the religious Orders, without which the Church cannot be the "*ecclesia semper reformanda*" (the Church that has the duty of constant renewal).

An expression of such a prophetic appeal is the following poem by a Franciscan Sister who wrote

it out of love and concern for the Church, in connection with the excommunication of the internationally well-known Asian theologian and priest, Tissa Balasuriya OMI from Sri Lanka. (His excommunication has since been withdrawn). His book *Mary and Human Liberation*, first published in 1990, was the cause of it. The Sacred Congregation for the Defence of the Faith declared that the book contained statements that were "incompatible with the faith of the Church" and the author was excommunicated. This happened without due process that the Canon Law (CJC 221 and 50) demands. The poem does not deal with the question of orthodoxy but with the right of a person in the Church, and with the way the Church is treating persons like Fr. Balasuriya, who has served the Church faithfully his whole life. The treatment should be in agreement with the spirit of the Gospel, even in case the theological reservations about his book were justified.



**To Pope John Paul II,
after the excommunication
of Fr. Tissa Balasuriya.**

*If you were Peter
I could call you "Brother"
and turn to you
in any kind of need,
my own and others.
But "Your Holiness"
makes barriers rise between us
that our Master,
yours and mine,
did not intend to be.*

*And so I stand from far away
and wonder -
do you remember still
that time in Galilee,
when Peter sank?
Did Jesus push him down into the waves?
Or did he punish him
for taking risks,
leaving security behind
to meet his Lord on troubled waters?
Which he would not have dared,
had Christ not called him: "Come!"*

*When Jesus built his Church on rock,
it was not for the rock
to crush life, love and freedom
in the defence of truth,
but to support the stumbling.*

*I want to plead with you:
Let Truth defend herself!
Let wheat and wild herbs grow together
until the time of harvest.*

*Only the sower
can see the difference
in the depths of time.*

*How easily good seed can be mistaken
for weeds and thrown upon the fire
to be burnt.*

*(Dark shadows of the Inquisition, away!) -
"So let both grow together
until the end," Christ said.*

*But who am I
to tell you this?
And yet, kings, too
have listened to their fools.
Why shouldn't you?*

Maureen More

Task

1. Talk about this poem together.
2. Find out, how fidelity to the Church and to the prophetic role of the Order meet in this poem.





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Picture Credits



Picture Credits

Cover: St. Francis.

P. 3 Stainglass window by Frère Éric, Church of Reconciliation at Taizé, France.

P. 5 Dream of Pope Innocent III by Benozzo Gozzoli (1420-1497), Fresco in the Church of San Francesco at Montefalco.

P. 6 Christ and His People according to Ps 28:9; 9th Century, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart.

P. 7 From: Adveniat.

P. 8 Woodcut by Paul Reding.

P. 9 From: Anton Rozetter/Haby Krämer: *Bist du es, der den Steinen die Härte nimmt?*

P. 10 "Anastasis-Resurecction", Mosaic

(1024-1055), Chios, Greece, Nea-Moni-Monastery.

P. 11 **Top:** Middle of 13th Century, Basilica di S. Croce, Florence.

Bottom: Linocut by Azariah Mbata.

P. 12 The Revelation of Jesus Christ. Apocalypse of Bamberg, ca. 1000, Reichenau.

P. 13 Photo: Heinrich Gockel OFM.

P. 14 Mural painting in St. Paul's-Church, Mtwara, Tanzania.

P. 15 Photo: H. Rondon.

P. 16 "The Church and People", Collage by Paul Reding.

