

The Franciscan Journey

Supplemental Readings

Chapter three: Francis ... Clare ... Catholic Doctrine

Pope Benedict XVI: "God is Love" (*Deus Caritas Est*), 25 Dec. 2005

Jesus Christ – the incarnate love of God

12. Though up to now we have been speaking mainly of the Old Testament, nevertheless the profound compenetration of the two Testaments as the one Scripture of the Christian faith has already become evident. The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism. In the Old Testament, the novelty of the Bible did not consist merely in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and in some sense unprecedented activity. This divine activity now takes on dramatic form when, in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the "stray sheep", a suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: "God is love" (*1 Jn 4:8*). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.

14. Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental "mysticism" is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (*1 Cor 10:17*). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become "one body", completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus' teaching on love. The transition which he makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbour, and his grounding the whole life of faith on this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality—something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization. Faith, worship and *ethos* are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's *agape*. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. "Worship" itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely, as we shall have to consider in greater detail below, the "commandment" of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be "commanded" because it has first been given.

Franciscan Journey Supplemental Readings, Chapter three — 2

The Church's charitable activity as a manifestation of Trinitarian love

19. “If you see charity, you see the Trinity”, wrote Saint Augustine.[11] In the foregoing reflections, we have been able to focus our attention on the Pierced one (cf. *Jn* 19:37, *Zech* 12:10), recognizing the plan of the Father who, moved by love (cf. *Jn* 3:16), sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem man. By dying on the Cross—as Saint John tells us—Jesus “gave up his Spirit” (*Jn* 19:30), anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit that he would make after his Resurrection (cf. *Jn* 20:22). This was to fulfil the promise of “rivers of living water” that would flow out of the hearts of believers, through the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. *Jn* 7:38-39). The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ’s heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. *Jn* 13:1-13) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. *Jn* 13:1, 15:13).

The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man’s sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this *service of charity*, on which I want to focus in the second part of the Encyclical.

29. We can now determine more precisely, in the life of the Church, the relationship between commitment to the just ordering of the State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other. We have seen that the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.

The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation “in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*.” [21] The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility.[22] Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as “social charity”. [23]

The Church’s charitable organizations, on the other hand, constitute an *opus proprium*, a task agreeable to her, in which she does not cooperate collaterally, but acts as a subject with direct responsibility, doing what corresponds to her nature. The Church can never be exempted from practising charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man needs, and will always need, love.

[11] *De Trinitate*, VIII, 8, 12: CCL 50, 287.

[21] John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 42: AAS 81 (1989), 472.

[22] Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (24 November 2002), 1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 22 January 2003, p. 5.

[23] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1939.

Francis of Assisi, Early Documents: Volume I, The Saint

“I Celano” (Thomas of Celano: “The Life of Saint Francis,” 1228–1229)

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Chapter VIII

HOW HE BUILT THE CHURCH OF SAN DAMIANO,
AND OF THE WAY OF LIFE OF THE LADIES LIVING IN THAT PLACE^b

¹⁸The first work that blessed Francis undertook,
after he gained his freedom
from the hands of his carnally-minded father,
was to build a house of God.
He did not try to build a new one,
but he repaired an old one,
restored an ancient one.^c
He did not tear out the foundation,
but he built upon it,
always reserving to Christ his prerogative,
although unaware of it,
*for no one can lay another foundation,
but that which has been laid,
which is Christ Jesus.*

1 Cor 3:11

When he had returned to the place mentioned where
the church of San Damiano had been built in ancient times,
he repaired it zealously within a short time,

b. Thomas uses the title, *Domina* [Lady] which traditionally referred either to princesses of blood or to nuns and canonesses. (See Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, ed. L. Favre, (Graz, 1883–1887). *Domina* 5, and *Domicellae* 2).

c. Thomas uses the adjective *novus* [new] thirty-nine times in this work emphasizing Francis as a “new soldier of Christ” (n. 9), a “new athlete of Christ” (n. 10), and a “new evangelist” (n. 89). Integrally associated with him are a new: mystery (n. 85), song (n. 126), Bethlehem (n. 85), miracles (nn. 119, 121), vine (n. 74), light (nn. 119, 123), order (n. 74), joy (n. 119), waters (n. 151), teachings (n. 26), spirit (n. 6) and rite (n. 89).

aided by the grace of the Most High.^a
 This is the blessed and holy place where
 the glorious religion and most excellent Order
 of Poor Ladies and holy virgins
 had its happy beginning,
 about six years after the conversion of the blessed Francis
 and through that same blessed man.

The Lady Clare,^b
 a native of the city of Assisi,
 the most precious and strongest stone of the whole structure,
 stands as the foundation for all the other stones.^c

For
 after the beginning of the Order of Brothers,
 when this lady was converted to God
 through the counsel of the holy man,
 she lived for the good of many
 as an example to countless others.
 Noble by lineage, but more noble by grace,^d
 chaste in body, most chaste in mind,
 young in age, mature in spirit,
 steadfast in purpose and most eager in her desire for divine love,
 endowed with wisdom and excelling in humility,
 bright in name, more brilliant in life, most brilliant in character.^e

¹⁹A noble structure of precious pearls arose above this woman,
 whose praise comes not from mortals but from God,
 since our limited understanding is not sufficient to imagine it,
 nor our scanty vocabulary to utter it.

Rom 2:29

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- a. Rebuilding churches was a medieval expression of piety. The eighth century author, Eddius Stephanus, for example, writes of the English saint Wilfrid (+710), that he first rebuilt a church at York and subsequently another in honor of Saint Peter and, finally, one in honor of Saint Mary. Cf. Eddius Stephanus, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, text, translation and notes by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Similar examples may be found in the following: Theodore of Cyrus, *A History of the Monks of Syria*, “Life of Julian,” 13, translated by R.M. Price, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1985); Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Life of Saint Malachy the Irishman* VI, 12.
- b. For further information on the life of Clare of Assisi, see *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, translated and edited by Regis J. Armstrong, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1993); Ingrid Peterson, *Clare of Assisi: A Biographical Study* (Quincy: Franciscan Press, 1993).
- c. This may allude to 1 Kgs. 7:9–10, a description of Solomon’s temple, and Rv 21:19, a description of the city walls of the heavenly Jerusalem and thus would refer to the temples of the historical and the heavenly Jerusalem.
- d. Cf. Jerome, *Paula* 1, “Noble in family, she was nobler still in holiness.”
- e. This is the earliest instance of the play on the name Clare or *Chiara* which is translated as “bright.” Thus the Latin text: *Clara nomine, vita clarior, clarissima moribus.*

First of all,
the virtue of mutual and continual charity
that binds their wills together
flourishes among them.
Forty or fifty of them can dwell together in one place,
wanting and not wanting the same things
forming one spirit in them out of many.^a

Second,
the gem of humility,
preserving the good things bestowed by heaven
so sparkles in each one
that they merit other virtues as well.^b

Third,
the lily of virginity and chastity
diffuses such a wondrous fragrance among them
that they forget earthly thoughts
and desire to meditate only on heavenly things.
So great a love of their eternal Spouse arises in their hearts
that the integrity of their holy feelings keeps them
from every habit of their former life.

Fourth,
all of them have become so distinguished
by their title of highest poverty
that their food and clothing
rarely or never
manage to satisfy extreme necessity.^c

²⁰Fifth,
they have so attained the unique grace
of abstinence and silence
that they scarcely need to exert any effort

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- a. “*Idem velle atque idem nolle, ea demum firma amicitia est* [Wanting and not wanting the same thing—this is the foundation of a firm friendship].” This is a proverbial saying that Sallust places in the mouth of Cataline who urges his fellow conspirators in the name of friendship to join him in revolt, cf. Caius Crispus Sallust, *Bellum Catilinarium*, XX 4 (The Loeb Classical Library) 33–34.
- b. The monastic tradition presented humility as the foundation of all virtue, e.g. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermo I in Nativitate Domine* (PL 183:115): “Be eager to humble yourselves, for [humility] is the foundation and guardian of the virtues.” “No gem,” writes Bernard, “is more resplendent . . . than humility.” Cf. Bernard, *De Consideratione ad Eugenium papam tertiam libri quinque* II 13. “What is as pure,” he asks, “or as perfect as humility of heart?” Bernard, *In Annuntiationes, Sermo III*, 9. Thomas, however, places it in the second position in the life of the Poor Ladies even though he echoes the earlier approach in suggesting that humility “preserves the good things bestowed by heaven” and enables them to “merit other virtues as well.”
- c. In this instance the Latin *titulus* [title] is a canonical term signifying the source of one’s adequate support. In the phrase *altissimae paupertatis titulo* [the title of the highest poverty] Thomas uses the term in a paradoxical way to indicate that the source of support of the Poor Ladies is poverty.

to check the prompting of the flesh
and to restrain their tongues.^a

Sixth,
they are so adorned with the virtue of patience
in all these things,
that adversity of tribulation,
or injury of vexation
never breaks or changes their spirit.^b

Seventh,
and finally,
they have so merited the height of contemplation
that they learn in it everything they should do or avoid,
and they know how to go beyond the *mind to God* with joy,
persevering night and day
in praising Him and praying to Him.

2 Cor 5:13

For the moment
let this suffice
concerning these virgins dedicated to God
and most devout servants of Christ.

Their wondrous life
and their renowned practices received from the Lord Pope Gregory,^c
at that time Bishop of Ostia,
would require another book
and the leisure in which to write it.

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- a. The vast amount of medieval literature on silence flows from the monastic tradition in which it was viewed as a form of abstinence. Cf. Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987); Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
- b. The cultivation of patience was seen as a primary means of identification with Christ. While strongly present in the literature of martyrdom, it entered into that of monasticism through the Desert tradition and became a prerequisite for the quiet of contemplation.
- c. *Institutio* [practices] refers to the *Form of Life* given by Cardinal Hugolino to the Poor Ladies of San Damiano in 1219, cf. Hugolino “The Form and Manner of Life Given by Cardinal Hugolino (1219)” in *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, translated by Regis J. Armstrong (St. Bonaventure: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1993) 89–100.

Francis of Assisi, Early Documents: Volume I, The Saint

From: “A Letter to the Entire Order” (1225–1226)

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- ²⁶Let everyone be struck with fear,
let the whole world tremble,
and let the heavens exult
when Christ, the Son of the Living God,
is present on the altar in the hands of a priest!
- ²⁷O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity!
O sublime humility!
O humble sublimity!
The Lord of the universe,
God and the Son of God,
so humbles Himself
that for our salvation
He hides Himself
under an ordinary piece of bread!
- ²⁸Brothers, look at the humility of God,
and *pour out your hearts before Him!*
Humble yourselves
that you may be exalted by Him!
- ²⁹Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,
that He Who gives Himself totally to you
may receive you totally!

