

Parisi, Daniela

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Interactions between Reflection and Praxis in the History of Economic Thought. The Case of the Franciscan Circles from XIII Century Assisi to the Present

DANIELA PARISI

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I. Introductory remarks

In all its long history the Church has always been aware of the challenge the world presents. This awareness has been a stimulus to reflect on the reality of worldly affairs, and the awareness itself has been provoked by thought and discussion not only within the Church. In this contribution I wish to refer to the dynamic interactions between reflection and praxis within the Church, in particular, within Franciscan circles. (Etchegaray et al., 1989; Boswell, McHugh, Verstraeten et al., 2000). I wish to start from the evidence that Francis of Assisi interrupted the silence about the novelties which accompanied the revival of trade in the 13th Century: it was a silence (some would have said it was deliberate) which embraced the merchants in their cities as much as the official spokesmen of the Church: Francis replies to the call of the crucified Christ (the crucifix of San Damiano) who said to him: “Francis, go and rebuild My House which, as you can see, is falling down into ruin” (St. Bonaventura, *Legenda Maior*, II).

Rebuilding the Church signified for him first, restoring its walls and foremost, recuperating the Gospel message and living it to the full. For Francis, as Franciscan scholars declare, becoming an *alter Christus* – “another Jesus Christ” - meant living each day as a sacrament, accepting wholeheartedly life as a special grace, making life in society a life of sharing brotherhood, and living in the world as being at home¹.

I would like to start from the evidence that the Franciscan movement, which developed from and around the Franciscan order, began as an attempt at social and religious reformation.

Gratuity, brotherhood, giving - we doubtless find difficulty in defining convincingly what we mean by these words. We tend to form our ideas on these fundamental concepts only when we come across concrete situations².

Even the philosophical reflection of our own times confirms these doubts and makes me more confident in following this method, in trying to achieve more clarity in defining meanings. Our perception of what constitutes evangelical form, changes and strengthens through time by sharing and expressing personal experience on different levels, both near and far in time and space; experience that accumulates in time and space and gives substance to the meaning of the term justice, good, peace, brotherhood, etc.

We can only say what we find tolerable or intolerable now, when a situation presents itself or it is perceived as a reflection of our system of values or, on the contrary, when it is in contrast with it.

Investigating into our own system of values of reference is experience, just as our carrying it into the streets, into the world around us to make it tangible, to interpret it, to put it into practice in acts and gestures repeated and connected to one another.

The unacceptability of a situation that we experience either directly or indirectly prompts us to find the path to a possible

justice, peace, good... to a way of life true to the Gospel, that takes other people's views into consideration too.

II. St. Francis and the “new things” in Assisi

My thoughts proceed from this general remark, to rest on the hub of a particular tradition which has offered its own vision of reality within the Roman Catholic Church, and which offers an example, a definite rule of life, which continues, practically unchanged, to evaluate “new things” and operate in the world. I am referring to the tradition of St. Francis of Assisi. I am convinced that we can learn a great deal “from this specific experience, in order to apply our discernment when engaged for social action”, as this meeting proposes.

A marked characteristic in Francis's life was that of being itself a judgement of the society in his time. He lived in Assisi in the 13th Century. Assisi was one of the most important centres of the new economic system of that century; money had become vital blood of the city and the surrounding countryside – indeed, money united these two realities in a single system. Not only in the sense that everything was paid for in cash, but in the sense that the whole concept of wealth and poverty was redefined according to the new criteria of possession of material goods, no longer agreeing to the old values of feudal power.

This changed the nature of the relationship between people, people and nature, people and time, people and society. Francis meditates on the new state of affairs and chooses a path that puts him outside the logic of the system of relationships, which was becoming the prevailing one in the city; this puts him outside the new commercial economy established in Assisi. He bases this choice on a critical view which is morally but also economically justifiable.

He chooses to remain outside, but not fruitlessly. He puts forward his own proposal, creatively. He proposes a model of “voluntary material poverty”, to be taken as a deep rejection of a certain interpretation of life, an interpretation which involved the inhabitants of Assisi in a non-critical, undiscerning

immersion in the new commercial society.

He saw that the society of his time had a new characteristic: a different conception of wealth and poverty. The relationship between wealth and poverty was changing because the whole social structure, which goes with a model of daily life was changing, too - a new model in which the chief characteristic was having, using and handling money.

In Assisi the possession of money – “big” money – was becoming the main reference point for evaluating the social position of the different persons, of their relationships and activities; everybody's identity was either obtained or lost, was socially accepted or ignored in accordance with possessing monetary wealth. It was money, in the sense of material riches what gave value and significance to life. Comparing to the decade of 1960, when they used to say “the medium is the message”, they should have said that money, which was supposed to be the means of trade, had become its very message: “For the person who pays, no questions are asked”. Money talks in the precise sense that “money works irrespective of the persons involved in a transaction” (Little, 1975: 13-14).

According to contemporary writings, the situation was like this: on the one side the increasing profits from commerce and speculative transactions brought about an investment diversion, to the detriment of agriculture. Agriculture fell in lack of tools and cattle, that is to say, the essentials for farming.

On the other side, the presence of “new” wealthy people brought about an undermining of the traditional social standards and, in the meantime, a rising and spreading fear of sudden poverty.

As a result of the phenomena, poverty increased: “new” poor people in the countryside as well as in towns. In addition, there was an increase in avarice and distrust, due to the rising fear strictly linked with the “new things” and the general state of inexperienced uncertainty³.

This way life, which was not based on relationships with people and things, was not recognized or experienced as a free gift of God. If this is the society which Francis had before his eyes and if these were his judgements of the way of life that was taking

root, his proposal was intended as a sign of how to approach this novelty so that it may turn into a chance to live in harmony with creation in the light of the Gospel.

III. St. Francis reflects on the meaning of the “new things” and makes his proposal

We don't want to discuss whether at the root of that change in Assisi there was the abandoning of God as the basic reference which, in turn, led to the use of the new means (money) and to its negative influence on relationships between people in the town. Neither we want to discuss the reverse that is the influence of the sudden introduction of money as a great new driving force that caused its possession to become the one and only criterion of reference between the inhabitants.

Neither it would be helpful to make a historical judgement on what all this meant for the traditional structure of Assisi's society. Up to that moment, internal relations, as well as those with the outside world were rigidly governed on the basis of reference to power, which had been inherited or won on the field and consolidated into stable hereditary feudal hierarchy; now this system was losing its meaning to be substituted with the novelty of stratifying *maiores* and *minores* on the basis of the power of money⁴.

This change created an interesting source of study for historians in many spheres because of its uniqueness in the 13th Century: it has been a subject for research for historians of the institutions, the Church, the economy, for historians of economic thought, philosophy, literature and art.⁵

What concerns us here is that, in Francis's eyes, the novelty was seen by his fellow townspeople as a distraction from the reference to God, the father and creator. The 'new thing' made people take their decisions in a light which not only severed the right relationship of people with God, but led to negative consequences in the system of relationships ruling within the created world⁶.

On this distortion of social relationships from the model of reference the analysis of Pietro di Giovanni Olivi is emblematic: in an unusual manner for those times, he achieves a

rational knowledge of the phenomenon trade/money to measure it against an evangelical model of reference. I am referring to his analysis of the formation of prices, of the conditions of demand for goods and their supply on the market, his analysis of the mercantile trade, of the public utility of trade as creating the provision of necessary goods, the analysis of the duties and risks that this activity brings with it and from which a profit is derived, which, justified by the function, is therefore, morally legitimate. But even the analysis of the *commutatio* by Duns Scotus and Antoninus, are all examples of the challenge put forward by reason⁷.

A set of phenomena and behaviours came about in Assisi, which started processes that in no way led to fraternity. Therefore money, which could have been considered an instrument at the disposal of the whole town, poor and rich alike, an opportunity for creating individual profit, but also common wealth, was being used in such a way that the relationship between the rich and the poor was signed by confrontation, dividing which in nature, in God's plan, was a brotherhood.

In this sense we must consider Francis's proposal of a “voluntary material poverty”: aimed at showing how to employ the novelty brought by money, in order to transform it into an opportunity of life in harmony with creation⁸.

He proposes the lifestyle of a “poor preacher” who does not live as a stranger to society, does not set himself outside the city boundaries, and does not run away from real life and the changes it imposes. The preacher, indeed, bases his credibility upon a life of poverty. The poverty of St. Francis is first of all, a refusal of the possession of wealth. This, if used in a way that upsets and divides the universal membership of the family created by God, can be an instrument of prevarication. Moreover, the meaning of St. Francis's poverty is an act of approaching both the human relationships and the relationship with God with an attitude of “minority”. It is in this sense that “to become wealthy” is “to receive from God”. Receiving and handling these gifts from God keeps the believer in the desired attitude: Francis proposed the model of a spiritual guide (preacher) which was intended by his followers also as a model

of a way of life. They intended the state of being poor, beggar, itinerant, or hermit, as a choice of a model which could inspire the listening to the Gospel: a *Form of Living* and the *Rule of an Order*. This was the task to be accomplished **for**, not necessarily by intending material poverty as a state of life, but by using poverty or wealth as conditions to spiritual wealth⁹.

The proposal of this alternative way of living is in contrast with the one against a fraternal attitude in society: new forms of wealth and poverty were present and therefore, new ways of considering these, too; new needs were emerging. St. Francis thought that the model of the poor preacher satisfied the needs that were making their way within the society, which were constituted, first of all, by a desire of sense.

At that time, anyone who examined the socio-economic novelties, tried to understand the new needs and to connect them with the new state of things.

This proposal made by St. Francis had very high costs for the individual, for the Order, and for society as a whole. The costs were high for those who decided to take on Francis proposal and spread it in the world. It was high for the original community which grew to become a “ruled” religious Order, a largely spread and articulated body. In his famous catalogue of the Medieval Franciscan Houses, Moorman writes that.

By the year 1217 the work of the friars had grown to such an extent that it was decided to divide the work and to set up a number of provinces. Italy has been divided into six provinces... France was divided into two ... The remainder was grouped into three: Germany (which included all the work in Central and Eastern Europe), Spain (also known as S. Jacobi or Portugal) and Holy land (or Syria). Shortly afterwards, between 1219 and 1223, two other provinces were created: Aquitaine and England. No other provinces were made until 1230 when the following were created: Saxony ..., Ireland, Aragon and Castile. During the next nine years a large number of provinces was brought into being as the number of convents grew rapidly... The two provinces of Germany ... and Saxony

were now increased to eight... Two more provinces were also made in France ... Finally, in 1263, two further provinces came into existence: Milan and Romania... This made a total of 34 provinces...

In addition, a number of Vicariates was also set up: by 1300 three in Europe and three in the East. Since then, there were also in some other places in North Africa and Russia. And:

When the Observant movement came into being toward the end of the fourteenth century, the friars who accepted this discipline soon became independent of the main part of the Order (Conventuals) and set up their own organization... A list of Observant provinces in 1506 gives forty seven provinces and two areas which they describe as Custodies (Moorman, *Appendix I* and *Appendix II*, 1983: 691-697).

In this situation of growing establishment of an Order, which rapidly “shifted from social dissent as a fraternity into the social responsibility of an order” there were very deep internal tensions concerning the observance of the rule up to the point that.

The Friars Minor could not agree on the rule at their general Chapter in 1230. They no longer enjoyed the consensus which carried Francis and his brothers into the 1220s. In the early years the brothers had worked out an economically and humanly persuasive way of life. Then, in the 1220s, men in increasing numbers entered the organization around Francis with other ideas about the organization’s purposes. And so the Friars Minor in 1230 had no way of reaching a sound agreement on “the rule and life”.

The ministers at the chapter spoke about the rule as from two distinct cultures as well as at cross purposes. One culture came from the schools, the other came from early Franciscan life. The learned culture eventually defined the Franciscan norm, both the meaning of Franciscan life as well as its rules. Alien to the founding years, it had much difficulty and no enduring success in imposing itself on its social body (Flood, 1992: 43.)¹⁰.

Costs were high for society too; if we look at the history of that time, it can help us to understand this. On the one hand, we know of the difficulties of relationship and the tensions between Order, clerics and Papal Authority on the subject of the role of Franciscans in the church, between the papal pressure towards clericalization, and that of Franciscan theologians to underline the providential importance of the Order (Capitani, 1985; Flood, 1992, Lambertini, 2002; Todeschini, 2002 (mainly: Chapter I, 4 about monks and “rationality”; Chapter II about “possessing”)¹¹. On the other hand, the disagreements between the different cultures: after those well-known chapters of the *Sources* about the mission of the brethren, about the first seven brothers on mission, their failure, and then about Francis in Syria, Morocco and Egypt, definite inculturization problems arose when the brothers began to migrate and to build convents, when the time of political negotiations was followed by the attempts at understanding one another and creating a dialogue¹². And finally, we know of the debates going on in society at large – between trades and professions: these debates are an important part of the history of the facts and ideas of the XIII and XIV centuries and much has been written about them.

Francis was on the ridge between spirituality (choice of prayer and preaching) and material reality (choice of poverty) and he kept exactly on balance between the two all his life. His idea was to live the spiritual side of life concretely, and the material side of life spiritually, and he made decisions that kept him from sliding down either of the slopes. He strove to create a “space”, a dimension within the world, that permitted the establishment and perfection of everyday relations and without interrupting them. This was proposed as well, for those who did not share the Franciscan rule of life.

The “space” was filled with the *usus pauper* of things and interpersonal relations, that was meant to be the opposite of overvaluation of temporal things and the interpretation of the holy message, which was focussed on its literal meaning¹³.

IV. Some concluding (not conclusive) remarks

On the basis of this analysis, I would like

to propose some bases for reflection:

1) If we search for the way that positive involvement must take, it is helpful to look at the real suffering of our life in society, the real discomfort, the new forms of disillusionment. We can look and interpret Francis’s way “here and now” in the sense that we can be persuaded that it is not in terms of broad principles of a system based on political decisions, on coercive power, that we can ground the concept that God is peace, and justice. In this sense, we do not want to follow ideals either inspired by “secular moralism”, or in the hope of a “Christian civilization” or inspired by the concept of “Christian politics”, in whatever form it is possible. We must look for the way of positive involvement.

Francis would say: repair the Church, not by changing the world into a cloister, not by bringing the cloister closer to the city, but by bringing the open cloister right into the heart of the city. This is the concept of Dante’s cloister, open both to the sky and to the chatter and business of the town, open to the Spirit in order to develop contemplation and personal relationships, open to prayer and work. This is the cloister that makes evident, through its daily tasks, the original and universal sharing of God’s gifts. This argument touches both the life within the Order and the presence of the Friars in the world.

As to the first aspect, the Franciscan Friars gathered for the Conference of the European Delegates of *Justice Peace Integrity of Creation (JPIC)* Commission (Assisi, November 2002), asked themselves what the correct response would be, in order to give a Franciscan testimony to the values of the Gospel in this particular time where there is more inter-relationship in the world, since they are more and more “aware of the links between poverty, environmental devastation and development”.

Today the Franciscan Order takes on the responsibility of being heir to St. Francis’s message by asking how the Order can continue to “be a sign for the times by living [our] the commitment to poverty and minority, eliminating the superfluous from our lives and living with respect for all creatures”.

The answer that has been given very recently by the Minister General to the friars seems to remind everybody that the way “we organize our society ... directly affects human dignity

and the capacity of individuals to grow in community". He asks "brothers and sisters [of the Order] to be coherent, that is to say, that our works should reflect the evangelical life we have chosen, a life open to the will of God. We must offer such a transparent image that it does not give rise to doubts or ambiguities on our evangelical option".

Helping the Church to read the signs of the times, he concludes, means making oneself the sign of the times, by integrating "justice, peace and the integrity of creation" in life and mission of the Order, and by generating "right relationships" for each friar, in each fraternity, with all the others and with creation (Giacomo Bini ofm, Minister General, Assisi, October 2002).

This remark brings us directly to the second aspect of what the Franciscan Friars hold as important, i.e. not "founding an exemplary fraternity but being himself [every Friar] a fraternal man"¹⁴.

Francis did not allow Assisi to decide what he and his friars should do: nor did he allow himself to be part of the town affairs nor did he have an institutional role. Francis neither experienced nor chose for his brotherhood a "de-situated" life, a special life inside a "bordered area", an "oasis cut off from the world", with its own special regulations. He heard the voice of God through the concrete experience of the life of Assisi: he did not look for friends or partners by choosing and picking through the inhabitants of the town, but he simply recognised the people he found there as brothers and sisters. He lived within, without accepting the perspectives which seemed to accompany the fact of being a citizen of that town¹⁵.

I am stressing here the importance for every person to maintain their personal identity and vocation in the city where they live so that the city may go on building itself, and renewing itself, welcoming and recognising the new elements, getting integrated. It is not a matter of building on the basis of separate parts but of safeguarding a new found identity¹⁶.

2) This way of thinking of Francis makes it possible for us to reflect and interpret our present situation. In our attempt we have a much more organized and varied tradition to help us, since our interpretation of the

world comes from specific knowledge (the sciences); we are helped by the discussions in the field of morality, both by the debate on moral ideas of the Church and the discussion of those ideas within the Church. There is also the possibility of mixing the two levels, as we can see in the cases - for example - of *Populorum Progressio, Laborem Exercens*¹⁷, *Centesimus Annus*¹⁸.

The interpretation of the present situation makes us concentrate on the new reality, which together with traditional certainties, makes up the present time on which we are called to learn to act.

I have said that we might consider St. Francis's choice as a parable. We know that a parable is a form of not "obvious" or "direct" preaching - a form of preaching used by Christ in public but not in private, so that his message was not immediately understandable but had to be discovered by each individual. The significance of the parable is a matter of personal research, and is not a kind of recipe that a good book makes available to any hasty dabbler completely ignorant of the art¹⁹.

From this point of view, the life of Francis of Assisi can be seen as a parable because each one of us has to make the effort to uncover the specific meaning of the "new life" that St. Francis embodies and which points to God.

As in every parable, the life of St. Francis holds something surprising which transmits to us a concept of the extraordinary that "cuts across the prevailing realism and suggests another dimension of reality which impinges upon the strictly human one" (Via, 1967: 66.).

Francis's choice is a choice of Christian brotherhood, and the story of his life, in all the episodes that have been passed down to us, is a continual confirmation of this choice²⁰.

We must ask ourselves, however, what is the specific Franciscan manner of experiencing brotherhood, what are the specific implications for our lives - those touching on interpersonal relationships, on the relationship with God, on the relationship with nature - through which the proposal of Christian brotherhood becomes part of our identity and is interpreted daily in the varied Franciscan family.

First, we can assert that a typical Franciscan way of living and making tangible the gratuitousness of the relationships among people and between God and the single

person is the sharing of individual capacities and duties: working in the “city” has this deep meaning and it is seen as a continuation of creation, or better still a co-creation.

A statement like this, related to capacity, duties, work, and respect of human personality, raises a wide range of questions.

Nowadays work is considered more human when it uses intelligence and imagination, when a person can take part in the work process with all his capabilities, with his dignity as a person, with creativity, with adaptability, with lively ability to keep himself up-to-date.

Work uses our insight, experience, powers of judgement, as well as our physical abilities - all operations through which we help to create the world while getting to know it. Possession and power over material riches, on the other hand, permit a few people to “enter the educated and prosperous system, while the vast majority remains on the side of the road, without participation, even without hopes” (Calvez, in Boswell, McHugh and Verstareten, 2000: 11).

It is not always possible to keep abreast of ever new requirements as very often the worker is not strong, or intelligent, or capable enough. So the social economic scene brings humiliation instead of gratification to the human personality.

3) If we go along this path thoroughly and widen the perspective, we see that St. Francis’s parable discloses its inner core behind every single human act: dispossession is what binds and combines the single facts of St. Francis’s biography and it is what makes fraternity come true. As Pietro di Giovanni Olivi wrote soon afterwards, poverty is an “intellectual choice” for which *donum, oblatio, eleemosyna*, are not only a form of humiliation but above all, an opportunity for trying out both by individuals and entire communities, one’s own particular capacities and, with an eye to following a life of perfection, to use wealth without abusing it (Todeschini, 2002: 193).

This possibility of an *usus pauper* of things, of the “unpossessive” (non *avarus*) disposition both towards wealth and towards poverty, depends also on one’s ability to develop through life the understanding of the economic and rational significance (in the sense of *recta ratio*) of this use²¹. We use material goods “purely” because they are useful and we are

profoundly and rationally conscious of this usefulness; we are able to be the master of goods by using them, distributing them, and administering them without making them “immovable”, without attaching ourselves greedily to them²².

This message seems to go on revealing its very essential meaning for us, now, when men and women “produced by our civilization have thought only about possessing” (Leclerc, cit.: 12).

Certainly, money is still an element of contradiction and a source of inconsistency between our daily choices and our point of reference in the Gospel: this is also true on a planetary scale. But not only money reveals our lifestyle in real terms.

In every age there are goods whose possession determines the social position in which each person lives. We are asked to refuse to make a pact with the new idol of our society: the style of poverty, in the sense of rejection of power and financial interest for itself or as a means to power, is putting oneself to the test through daily work, seen as a continuation of the divine act of creation. In this light, work becomes the restitution of freedom and autonomy (caring for physical suffering) and gives back to people the power to share²³.

In this light, the spiritual attitude of minority is not precisely a “concrete function to be fulfilled” but a “permanent state” of mission “helped by no fixed property; it is a mission to be lived among the people as servant of all, submissive, peaceful and humble” (J. Garrido ofm, in: Order of Friars Minor-Office of JPIC, *Instruments of Peace – A Franciscan Resource Book for JPIC*, 1999). Minority is a “key for our [minor brothers and sisters] self-understanding and for overcoming a model of society that excludes many” (P. Schorr ofm, *Letter from the International Congress of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation to our Brothers*, in *Instruments of Peace...*, 1999, cit.: 265. About “Minorite love”: Peixoto, 2000).

In spite of the fact that in this brief paper I have made special reference to the Order of the Friars Minor, I do not wish to forget to underline that it is the whole Franciscan family which shows us a specific manner to put into practice a central element of Christian living, that is acceptance of gifts. Life gets simpler and more of one piece around that central

message only if you free yourself from the rest. Getting rid of your own will as the chief value means giving to whatever life brings a leading role. In this sense, real wealth is the most valuable thing, and it is also the coinage to use and put into circulation.

It is a matter of co-operating and acting vigorously, neither creating a chain of dependency-inducing relationships, nor partnerships characterised by unequal, unfair, master-servant, paternalistic relationships; nor forming external dominations, as we act within existing cultures, institutional architectures, ways of living; nor using managerialism and the meta-language of management in improbable places and situations. Anyway, our everyday life runs the risk of cultivating a misrepresentation of reality and of making each of us donors – at least men/women helping donors – or recipients of false riches that create false discourses and practices.

4) In the end we must ask ourselves what instruments do Franciscans hope to use nowadays to put into practice this line of spirituality, and I myself ask: Is there and, if so, what is “minorite economics” today?

On this issue I can put together some brief indications coming from recent documents produced within the Franciscan Family.

Today the Order of Friars Minor is “strongly recommended” by its Definitior General-Director of JPIC Office in Rome, to insert “fraternities in poor areas while respecting popular cultures and religious devotions and practices”; he feels the urgency to concretize the ideal of minority through “the practice of justice and a simple lifestyle”.

This general aim has to be pursued paying careful attention to the promotion of “greater equality among the friars and greater accountability for the administration of the resources” of the fraternities, and, at the same time, initiating without delay “a process of reflection regarding ethical investment and patrimony”; “facing the ever-new challenges of being friars in today’s world”, establishing an ongoing internal dialogue and network within the Franciscan Family, engaging serious reflections on JPIC values and issues²⁴.

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¹ Francis *alter Christus* in the sense of a 'living' adhesion to Christ, able to penetrate the secrets of existence, that is, the vital links in the relationship between death and life, desperation and hope, failure and success.

² On the difficulty in classifying what is just or not for actions that are "responses to constantly changing realities and circumstances..." see Beretta in Boswell, McHugh and Verstraeten, 2000: 238.

³ See, mainly, Sinibaldo de' Fieschi, pope Innocent IV's *Apparatus* (1251), Pietro di Giovanni Olivi's *Tractatus* and Enrico di Gand's *Questiones* (1276).

⁴ "...the commutation of feudal military obligations into money payments constituted a major political as well as administrative change (...) The money economy was altering some of the individual's relationship's with nature, with work, with time, with human society and with his own deepest values and religious beliefs..." (Little, 1975: 15).

⁵ With reference to its effect on art history, see Thode, 1885. "The idea that religion and nature are one harmonious whole is an idea that originates in Francis of Assisi (...) by examining the Christian faith, translating it into tangible images and giving it popular form [Franciscans] have given Christian art one of the main conditions for its existence". The main elements which emerge are: the recognition of the personality of each and every human being, nature as a go-between between men and God: man contemplates God through nature, contemplated by man and the image of God. In this sense 13th Century Tuscany is the cradle of the Italian Renaissance. See: Bellosi, *Prefazione*, in Thode, 1993: XI.

⁶ "God, Who through the Word creates all things and keep them into existence, gives men an enduring witness to Himself in created realities" (*Dei Verbum*, Nov. 18th 1965, n. 3; with reference to: *Rom.*, 1, 19-20). We can intuit God invisible qualities, applying our mind to created realities, because these qualities are testified in created realities (natural divine revelation).

The recent interpretation of *The Canticle of Brother Sun* by Edoardo Fumagalli is of interest as it suggests that the Latin preposition *per* in the lines of praise should not be interpreted as *through*, but may well have the value of agent and therefore should be understood as *by* [*all Your creatures*] (Fumagalli, 2000).

⁷ This process initiated in the 12th Century with the debate between Bernard and Abelard and the work of mediation made – with "intelligent friendliness" and "charity", giving witness to genuine Christian pluralism – between their opinions by Venerable Peter of Cluny (Zerbi, 2002: 160-163), prepared the ground for the modern proposal of intellectual autonomy, and is said to be the origin of Christian Humanism.

⁸ "...Holy Lady Poverty, may the Lord save you and your sister, Holy Humility (...) Holy Poverty destroys all cupidity and avarice and anxiety for the things of this world. Holy Humility destroys pride, all men who are of the world, and all the things which are in the world" (St. Francis, *A Salutation to the Virtues*).

⁹ Because poverty or wealth are in themselves "spiritually neutral unless accompanied by the love of God": we need a religious commitment to approach poverty (Sontag: 240-242). For a discussion of different contemporary positions on the biblical "option of the poor", see Dorr: 249 ff. and the very recent Todeschini, 2002, Chapter III (about "making use of things"), Chapter VII (about "opportunity of making riches useful for the community"), Chapter VIII (about "managing riches as a form of institutionalized charity").

¹⁰ To read the *De vera laetitia* and to confront it with what happened in the decade that followed St. Francis's death helps us to understand the number of metamorphoses experienced by the Franciscan Order, both within the order itself and

in its relationship with the Church and society. Without taking into consideration the fact that not much later the dramatic period of decadence of the Church and the Order was about to come to a head, a dramatic aspect is linked, for instance, to the story and the fate of Angelo Clareno (Merlo G.G., *Nel nome di San Francesco. Storia dell'Ordine dei frati minori e del francescanesimo*, Edizioni Francescane, Milano, forthcoming 2003).

¹¹ Putnam has claimed that the Catholic Church discouraged the growth of trust by its imposition of a hierarchical structure. I think that to limit this point of view would generate very incomplete interpretations of what the Medieval Church was: horizontal bonds of fellowship were certainly formed in that part of the Church which stuck to the Rules and at the same time the presence of different points of view on which interpersonal relationships were based undoubtedly produced discussion and argument (Putnam, 1993).

¹² In the middle of the 13th Century Papal Bulls from Innocent VI to the Tartar king and people were entrusted both to Preaching Friars and Friars Minor; one of these got to its destination at Caracorum by means of Giovanni di Pian di Carpine who returned to Lyon with a written message on behalf of the king of the Mongols which showed a refusal to open to papal approaches.

The most recent bibliography to be found concerning the early Franciscan missions is that included in the translation of the brief and succinct account of the journey to the East (as far as the court of the Great Kahn) made in 1252 by the Flemish friar William of Rubruc who carried a letter from Louis IX. (Guglielmo di Rubruc, *Viaggio nell'impero dei mongoli*, translation and notes by Luisa Dalledonne, Introduction by Gian Luca Potestà, Genoa, Marietti, 2002).

¹³ On the *usus pauper* controversy which split the order between the thirteenth and the fourteenth century and the indissoluble connection between *usus pauper* and vow, see Burr, 1975; Burr, 1992.

¹⁴ Leclerc, 1999, in: Order of Friars Minor-Office of JPIC, *Instruments of Peace – A Franciscan Resoueece Book for JPIC*. Francis's "spiritual life did not take place in a separate universe. He went to God with his cosmic roots..."

¹⁵ This concept was expressed by Br. Peter Schorr ofm (Definitor General for JPIC) in his *Words of Farewell* "Our convent is the world where we live and work. Our convent is the world where we meet our human beings, especially the poor who still have no rights or voice. We go out to them to give a voice and that they may rise up. We return to our places with our brothers and sisters, guided by the Holy Spirit as instruments of peace" (*Instruments of Peace Led by the Spirit*, "International Franciscan Congress", Vossenack, Germany 2000, Studio VD, Città di Castello (PG), 2001: 263).

¹⁶ In his *Discourse to the City of Milan* of 28th June 2002, cardinal C. M. Martini, at the very time he was leaving his archbishopric, he developed this concept.

¹⁷ The *Introduction* by Boswell, McHugh and Verstraeten to the volume *Catholic Social Thought: Twilight or Renaissance?* develops the theme of "large and complex areas which lie between, on the one hand, broad values and principles and values". Calvez, in the same volume underlines that "the bishops also have a part to play", and "the important role of non-official thought in complementing and carrying forward the official social teaching. Hellemans refers to the need for "a permanent discussion, consultation and co-operation process on social issues...". Verstraeten focuses on and develops the theme of the discussions on the use of the term 'doctrine' in Catholic thought and affirms "that a Catholic social tradition of reflection and praxis, ..., not only needs inspiration from other traditions of interpretation and inquiry, but from a living relation to the text of Bible..." and stresses the importance of the "biblical narratives". His reference is to P. Ricoeur but I would like to refer to the recent discourse of C.M. Martini on *The Word of God and the Future of Europe*. Lesch, in the same volume, points out that "even if the Church as an institution and continues to promote a social doctrine on her own there is no privileged access to truth in matters of society, economy and politics... Using the philosophical means of modernity social thinking has to remain a critical observer of the pathological effect of the global acceleration of all kinds of mobility and efficiency". As Boswell and Hogan say, "the marginalisation of CNOT appears paradoxical for an institution as historically embedded as the Catholic Church", also because "the shape of non-official Catholic Social Thought is changing..."

¹⁸ Important attempts at reflection in this manner are contained for example in the Acts of the International Congress on the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (Uca, Buenos Aires, 1998, in course of publication) and in those delivered on the occasion of the *Laborem Exercens* Conference (Vatican City and Rome, Sept. 1991).

¹⁹ On this profound significance of the word in parables, in Kings 19.12b; Mark 4, 11-12; John 16.25, see: D.O. Via, *Parables. Their Literary and Existential Dimension*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia 1966; C.M. Martini, *Perché Gesù parlava in parabole?*, EDB-EMI, Bologna 1996 (I ed. 1985).

²⁰ Francis's presence "is profoundly human as well as evangelical and cosmic. A total presence that has the gift of converting all hostility into fraternal tension, within the unity of creation" (Paul Ricoeur quoted in Leclerc, *Franciscan Presence to the World*, in Order of Friars Minor: 12).

You could use B. Nelson's phrase in this regard: St. Francis managed to create the passage from "tribal

Brotherhood” to “universal Otherhood”.

²¹ Idem, II, 4. “Non igitur oportet quod quantitas usus pauperis determinetur in puncto nec secundum uniformitatem realem sed potius secundum quod recta ratio dictat pensatis debetis circumstantiis secundum diversitatem personarum negotiorum temporum et locorum”. (Pietro di Giovanni Olivi, in Todeschini, cit.: 342).

²² Idem, III.

²³ It seems to me that this is the style put forward by the *Work Pastoral Care* which puts forward the objectives of giving back to people the power to plan and hope, “healing the sick”, that is caring for physical suffering, and giving back the ability to share things, “sending away demons”, that is sending away the spirit of hopelessness and fear that prevents people from being real people (Luke, 9, 1-3). C.M. Martini, *Message delivered on the occasion of the “Day of Solidarity”*, February 9th 2002. Lack of hope takes away personal dignity and estranges; forms of exchange based on reciprocity rather than “the equivalence of the market” manage to include

people who would otherwise be excluded from the area governed by the principles of economics.

²⁴ Obviously, every specific suggestion brought forward in the Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF, founded in 1996) would deserve to be examined here. In particular I refer to the special suggestions put forward by the Poor Clares (the Second Order), which point to the spirituality of St. Clare, based on humility and fraternity (*Women and the Charism of Francis and Clare*, in Order of Friars Minor, 1999: 108-116; Bartoli, 1992), and that of the Third Order Regular and Secular, and those of the Conventuals, the Capuchins, CFI-Tor and Brothers of the TOR. But also, because of their similarity and their projects for Human Rights in Geneva, those of the Dominicans.

I am referring also to the proposals given on the occasion of the meetings of the Sub-Saharan Conference (Nairobi, Kenya, September 2002), of the East Asia Conference and of the Pan-American Meeting (November 2002)