

The biblical foundation of the Franciscan mission



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

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

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

In 325 under the emperor Constantine, Christianity became the religion of the State. As a result of this turning point, people arose to take over the task of the prophets: Christians who understood the dangers inherent in this change organized themselves according to the model of the early Church.

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

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