

# BASIC COURSE

on

## Franciscan- Missionary Charism



## Christianity - Religion of Incarnation

## Lesson Unit 01

**T**he 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.



**Editor and copyright:**  
International Board of the CCFMC

**Project Address:**  
CCFMC Centre:  
Haugerring 9  
D - 97070 Wuerzburg  
Germany

**[www.ccfmc.net](http://www.ccfmc.net)**



# Go, Rebuild My Church!

*A Comprehensive  
Course on the  
Franciscan Mission  
Charism*



## Christianity - Religion of Incarnation



### Lesson Unit 01



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# From the Sources

## How Francis Celebrated Christmas

It happened in December 1223. Once again Francis was living in a hermitage near Greccio, a little town in the Rieti valley. There, out of the blue, an idea struck him. "How would it be," he thought, "if I could see with my own eyes how small God wants to be? What would it be like if I could touch with my own fingers the misery into which God was born that time in Bethlehem? Yes, what about the presence of an ox and a donkey at Christmas and, with my whole being, bending over the great poverty that Jesus had taken upon himself in the manger that first Christmas?"

Now Francis was not a dreamer! He had to act. Therefore, at a given time, he invited a friend to come to a certain cave. He asked him to drive an ox and an ass into that cave and to have a manger ready, filled with hay. And, above all, people should come, big ones and small ones, as many as were able to come. And then Francis saw how God makes himself small every day. He touched God's poverty, he smelled His presence among the animals and he bent over the poor God. And he sang with the people the song of God's human countenance (see ICel 84-86).



# A. Introduction

## Serve the Church and the World

Throughout the ages, until today, the Franciscan movement has had a task to fulfill in the Church and in society. But what is its task? What significance does it have for the world? And what significance does the world have for the Franciscan family?

The Franciscan movement needs to find clear answers to these questions. Only then will the need for taking a critical look at the essential elements of our missionary spirituality become evident.

It is important to realize that this course will be used all over the world. We do not live and work in isolation. We are not alone in our effort to come to a new understanding of our place in the Church and in today's world. In Asia, Africa, Latin America, in North America and Europe - everywhere, there are people who are facing the same questions. Being inspired by the same message, we can serve the Church and the world, as the global Franciscan family.

As members of the Franciscan family, we can make an impact. But we need to stop belittling ourselves! Jesus tells us, "You are the light of the world!" – "You are the salt of the earth!" – "You are a city built on a hill!" We have a message. We have a vision of life that we want to share - a way of living for which many are searching.

Francis and Clare of Assisi lived their faith in Christ in a special way, a way that would make human beings truly more human and this world a better place in which to live. With Francis and Clare, we witness to a God who is involved in this world. We point to a mystery that is present, to a God who wants to liberate us from all kinds of bondage. We are witnesses of the Incarnation.



## B. Survey

In this first lesson we introduce the religion of the Incarnation, to which we all witness by our way of life, irrespective of our particular branch or congregation.

For variety in the presentation, this lesson will challenge us by introducing the reflections of some writers outside our Franciscan family. They often look at our origins with a clearer vision than we, and with an immediacy that we might have lost to a certain degree. From this new perspective then, we shall stress the “secular character” of the Franciscan vocation. This will not be possible, however, without first clarifying the meaning of ‘secular’. It will become clearer

that Francis did not want to settle in specific places, but regarded the whole world as his ‘cloister’. But in time, all three Orders lost sight of their original source, a source that becomes visible in the Incarnational theology of Francis and Clare. Just as the First and the Second Order draw life and inspiration from this perspective, so too does the Third Order.

Hopefully, the new insights gained from this viewpoint will lead to a greater understanding of the concepts of ‘mission’ and ‘evangelization’.

## C. Information

### With New Eyes

We, the different branches and communities of the Franciscan family, may not have always fully understood Francis and Clare. Perhaps we have even moved away from the path they pointed out to us. Therefore, it is important that we look at them with ‘new eyes’ and speak about our mission in a ‘language’ that will enable us to live it in today’s world.



# 1. We are open to be Challenged

Listen to some voices outside the Franciscan family telling us from their perspective who Francis and Clare were and what they mean to the world.

The French historian Ernest Renan (1823-1892) was convinced that there were three great and decisive moments in history: the appearance of Christianity, the French Revolution and the Franciscan Movement of the 13th century. Paul Sabatier, the Protestant writer to whose research work the Franciscan family is greatly indebted, reports what Renan had told him:

When I started working, I dreamt of consecrating my life to three epochs, blessed be the dreams of youth! Three epochs: the origin of Christianity in relation to the history of Israel, the French Revolution, and the wonderful religious renewal brought about by Francis of Assisi. I could only finish the first part of my program, "but you, Mr. Leblond," he said to a young man who seemed to be of good health, but soon after died of overworking, "you must be the author of the religious history of the French Revolution." "And you," he said to Paul Sabatier as he put his hand on his shoulder as if to keep him from slipping away, "you will be the seraphic historian. I envy you; Francis has always smiled at his historians. What he set in motion and accomplished in the course of centuries, has never been fully understood. He rescued the Church of the thirteenth century and since then his spirit has remained strangely alive. We are in need of him. If we desire it intensely enough, then he will come back."

Indeed, Paul Sabatier became an important chronicler of our Franciscan history. Since then, Francis has been like a thorn in the flesh of the Franciscan family and of society.

It is not in vain that so many books on Francis continue to be published all the time. Yet, do we really know so much more about Francis and Clare? Have we really understood them? Shouldn't we be fascinated by their lives once again?

As another example: what might Voltaire, the revolutionary spirit of France, have thought of Francis, his patron saint? Even today, people still see Voltaire as an unbeliever because he distanced himself from the traditional form of Christianity of his time. In spite of that, every year he celebrated the feast of his patron saint on October 4th. He felt at home in the Capuchin Friary of Gex, and the Capuchins regarded him as one of them. Could this, perhaps, be a sign that Voltaire felt attracted by an alternative way of living one's faith, a way he saw realized in Francis and Clare?

The form this could take is made clear in one of the latest books on Francis by H. Feld, Franziskus von Assisi und seine Bewegung (Francis of Assisi and His Movement).

Above all, it is the ideas related to the redemption of the world, the vision and utopia of a new, peaceful world that gives Franciscanism a continuing actuality, not only for Christians and for people who are interested in religious themes, but for all who are not indifferent towards the destiny of the world and their own individual death (Feld 7).

Another witness is Walter Dirks, the German writer who saw the mission of St. Francis realized above all in the Secular Franciscan Order:

Too often the Third Order was taken for a closed order, a pious association. This concept is too narrow. I suppose that St. Francis himself cannot



be blamed for it. The Third Order was meant to be a movement, even an historic power. The challenge of the specific Franciscan form of life of the first two orders ultimately aimed at the new rich class, similar to how the challenge of Benedict's fraternal working-community was aimed at the powerful of his time. Therefore, one can say that the specific historical mission of the saint was directed towards the Third Order Secular whose meaning was not to make the poor pious, nor to make them love poverty, and even less to make the rich "pious", to catch them in a system of prayers and ransom. The aim of the Secular Order was: to let the rich be rich in a Christian way. How, then, can a rich person whole-heartedly be involved in secular tasks and at the same time remain a Christian? Or even better, become a saint? This is the question of the Secular Order. This was the question of the thirteenth century, the incubation period of capitalism.

The Secular Order could only be thought of as a Christian fraternity, which, loosely held together by a minimum of regulations, saw its activity as an order in the world in the business of its members, in their marriages, in their guilds, in their city halls. It would have been their function to build the civil society within the parameters of a salvific Church.

It was the task of the bourgeois to turn the "modern age" into a Christian epoch, and to turn the secular and intellectual history of this age into a chapter of the salvation history of humankind. This universal Third Order should have been epoch-making, should have made history. Francis understood it that way. He trod money into the dust, because he saw clearly that money, as mammon, as the fetish of the centuries of the bourgeois, would replace the crucified and resurrected God. He filled the breach against a dangerous enemy. His Third Order Secular, empowered by the prayer, the fraternity and the life of the brothers and sisters of the First and Second Order, had the task to

deal with money and with the age of money in a Christian way. As far as this is concerned, Francis failed historically, just like Benedict did. In keeping with the secularization of the middle class is the spiritualization of religious life.

Whenever a rift comes between the secularized conduct of the people of the world and the spiritualized consciousness, the bridges and intermediaries- alms and pious foundations- become enormously important as a ransom, a bridge from secularism to an isolated piety. The Third Order itself was for a time such a means of ransom, and when the powerful and rich no longer found it necessary to ransom themselves, when their emancipation had become self-conscious and had cast off the shell of its Catholic-Christian past, when the rich and powerful either did not pay any more or paid only out of humane compassion, the Third Order shrank to a pious brotherhood of little people. It should have corrected the course of history for several centuries; it actually became a pious club (Dirks, 171-181, slightly abridged).

This text is challenging in many ways, especially for those who claim the heritage of Francis and Clare as their own.

It appears that Francis' mission found real meaning in the Third Order. Its task is the sanctification of the world, penetrating the world with the Holy Spirit. According to Dirks, the First and the Second Orders exist only to enable the Third Order to develop fully. What is needed is not the renunciation of sexuality, money and power, but just the opposite: the meaningful use of money, reaching out into the whole world, exercising a positive influence on trade, politics, marriage, the building of the earthly city.

Instead, according to Dirks, the Third Order became a 'pious club'. It is not what it was intended to be. Therefore it too is partly responsible for the world becoming so godless.



Dirks argues that the First and the Second Orders also failed their mission. The Franciscan Movement has failed just as much as Christianity has in general.

One should not be offended and forget the challenge that has been expressed. Rather, the stories of Francis and Clare should be read again in light of this challenge. In this way, we might be able to reclaim our original mission.

## 2. The 'secular character' of the Franciscan Order

Taking a closer look, it becomes obvious that the Franciscan vocation is 'secular' through and through. When we look at their origins, not only is the Third Order Secular (Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis) 'secular', but so are the First and Second Orders.

### 2.1. What is meant by 'worldly' or 'secular?'

Before this concept is traced further, it is important to clarify the meaning of 'secular'. In this context, 'secular' means anything but 'godless' or 'secularized' (see Lesson Unit 14). It is just the opposite. God allows the divine self to be found in a worldly form: in all the things of this world, as Ignatius of Loyola says; in the people with their needs and worries, with their joys and hopes; in the animals, the plants, the stones; in the concrete situations and social circumstances; in the events and experiences of history. The religious person does not need to go into the desert or climb a high mountain or withdraw into the depth of the soul in order to find God (as much as one can, of course, also do that). One need not leave the world behind in order to meet God. This is consistent with the teachings found in the scriptures.

In the history of the Christian churches, there is another influence that is noticeable. Reality was seen as consisting of two parts - the world, which was taken to be something inferior or even evil, and the spirit, which was the better or even the only good part of reality. Therefore, one had to despise the body and focus on the spirit, mortify

the senses and awaken the faculties of the soul: one had to flee the world and abandon oneself of God. An irreconcilable contrast existed, dualism.

Consequently, the early Christian ascetics left behind the cities and moved into the desert. Their followers were seeking a religious lifestyle, renouncing property (poverty), a will of their own (obedience), and the realization of their sexuality (celibacy). There were many positive elements and real values in these three expressions of the Christian life. Continuing into our own time, they have been the essential motives and points of view for many Christians. Originally, however, these three elements were filled with a dualistic spirit that despised the world.

This dualism has alien, non-Christian roots. That's why it cannot serve as an orientation for a Franciscan lifestyle. The world is God's creation, in which God's glory shines forth. As much as God dwells in the human soul, God also acts in the history of humanity. In the theophany of the burning bush, it is revealed to Moses that he is called into service for an historic task. He is to lead the chosen people out of slavery and oppression into freedom. God is present in the peoples' processes of liberation and in their efforts for justice and peace. God became incarnate (Jn 1) and wants to remain present in the world until the end of time (Mt 28:20). Those who want to follow God must do so in this world.



## 2.2. The World as Cloister

At first glance, it would appear that Francis and Clare were also influenced by the spirit of dualism. They fasted and mortified the flesh, they were strict with “Brother Donkey” – the body-in a way that we can scarcely understand today. Both of them ‘left the world.’ Francis uses this phrase to express the fact that after the kiss of the leper, his life changed radically. But he did not go to a place outside the world; quite the contrary!

Perhaps it is good to call to mind the whole passage in which Francis describes his conversion:

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world (Test 1-3).



It is significant here that Francis experiences God in the midst of the world: in the embrace of an outcast, a poor despised man, in the encounter with social misery that approaches him in the form of an individual person. The world that Francis leaves behind is a particular kind of world, a world that is characterized by heartlessness and, therefore, continually produces lepers. And he enters a different world, a world characterized by compassion that brings the excluded back into the centre. He wants a world which puts an end to any kind of exclusion and enables people to experience God like an encounter, an embrace, a kiss.

The new command that he gave his fraternity shows that Francis did not really leave the world but regarded it as the place of his new life. In this context we could say:

“When the brothers go about through the world, they should” live according to the spirit of the Gospel (cf. RegNB 14:1).

Francis understands his community as one that is itinerant, of being on the way. They should never settle anywhere, neither on mountains nor in valleys; they may only stay for a time and then move on again. In the great mystery play, Francis and Lady Poverty, written by an unknown Franciscan in the 13th century, “Lady Poverty” asks Francis and his brothers where their cloister is. They reply with a sweeping gesture of their hands, showing her the whole world as far as she could see and say: “This ‘Lady’ is our cloister” (SC 63). Francis’s great poem, The Canticle of Brother Sun, is a hymnic, liturgical expression of a fully secular spirituality.

It would be helpful to read the basic texts of St. Francis in a ‘worldly’ way. For instance, compare the Rule of 1221 with the Letter to all the Faithful. This Rule is the foundation of the First Order, the Letter to the Faithful is the foundation of the Third Order. There are only a few



passages in the Rule that could not just as well be contained in the Letter and vice versa, apart from the many sentences that sound similar or even identical.

It is compelling to conclude, then, that the First and the Third Order, and probably, also the Second, are moved by the same spiritual dynamism. God must be sought, found and witnessed in the world. We are those witnesses in this world.



## 2.3 Counter-developments

The secularity of the Franciscan vocation would not be carried on for long. Soon, counter-developments came into play which led the Franciscan reform movement and its renewing thrust back onto traditional paths.

Part of this development was the inclusion of the three vows into the Rule of 1221. Shortly before that Rule was written, religious life in the Church had been reduced to the three evangelical counsels. The papal curia was so fascinated by them that they included them in the Franciscan Rule. Fifty years after the Franciscan Rule was written, poverty, obedience and chastity, the so-called “evangelical counsels”, had moved right into its centre.



They emphasized the characteristics common to all religious communities. Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas, the two great theologians of the Franciscans and the Dominicans, contributed to such a theology of the evangelical counsels. This theology belongs to the best reflection of the Church on the Christian way of life that has ever been produced. Yet, one cannot ignore that in this way of living, the specific characteristics of a spirituality moved into the background. Instead of witnessing to the secular character of the Franciscan spirituality, the Franciscans soon stressed distance from the world, which is indicated by the three evangelical counsels. Interpreting the evangelical counsels as ‘worldly’, is becoming clear only in our time. During past centuries, they were mostly a wall that separated the first two Orders from the Third Order.





Soon the wall around the monastery was also becoming more associated with the Franciscan Order. Instead of living in provisional 'places', as Francis had wanted, the Franciscan communities lived in 'monasteries', in solid, walled-in, fortress-like buildings. The separation from the world, or rather, from the 'worldly people' was almost complete. The enclosure, especially that of the Poor Clares, became indispensable. There is much evidence that this was a later development which had the support of the Church. The Second Order especially received a rule from Cardinal Hugolino, later Pope Gregory IX, more than half of which consisted of regulations about the enclosure. The First Order, as well as the Second Order adapted a monastic life as it had never been known before. Certainly, this was not what Francis and Clare intended.

In addition, the First Order soon became 'clericalized'. Francis was a layman according to his spirituality, even if he was a deacon according to his canonical status. It was his will that his brothers should belong to the "bottom layer" of the Church (see 2Cel 148), as quite ordinary lay people, but with a special task. In

the midst of the people they were to live the Gospel radically: being poor with the poor, being brothers and sisters to one another in a concrete community, proclaiming the presence of God in all the situations of everyday life and in the whole world, in communion with all who believe and who want to be the Church of Jesus Christ.

With the first priests entering the Order, the focus of the Order shifted. The admittance of clerics brought about a development that followed laws of its own; more and more priests were joining the Order until they eventually permeated all levels of Franciscan life. As soon as Francis was dead, brothers from their ranks were being consecrated bishops and even elected to the office of Pope, clearly against the expressed will of Francis. With this, a growing distance from the world had begun, a movement that was not Francis' original intention. Certainly, Francis did not foresee this taking place. On the contrary, he was convinced that the priests who joined his brotherhood were able to submit to the newly discovered spirit of special care for the world. Today, developments in our world have once again opened up new opportunities in this direction.

The Third Order, too, became more and more estranged from the world. In some places it formed itself into a community and was surrounded by walls and by a strict enclosure.

Where tertiaries lived in the world, they created for themselves an enclosure of the heart. They became a pious association that remained without any significant social influence. Its condition in many parts of the world today shows how much the Third Order is suffering because of this image. Yet, there was a time when the Third Order, despite of or because of its basically penitential character, was also socially influential. It is known that the refusal to carry weapons and to serve in an army undermined the political system of that time.



Some feudal lords had to give up their local wars, as most of their subjects were members of the Secular Franciscan Order.

These few comments are enough to express the challenge to return to our origins! As the Franciscan family we are called to rediscover the original 'worldliness', a spirituality that is given to all of us, one that we have in common, one that goes beyond any remaining differences.

## 2.4 Franciscan Devotion to Christmas

To rediscover this 'worldliness' we should find out why Francis called Christmas 'the feast of all feasts' (2 Cel 199).

To many theologians, such a statement sounds like an aberration of popular piety. For them, Easter, (Good Friday until Pentecost) has to be the feast of all feasts. Unfortunately, in many places Christmas is nothing but a sentimental and noncommittal affair, a flight from earthly realities into a nice perfect world that has nothing in common with reality.



But one can see Christmas differently from a theological point of view. The Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus takes as a point of departure the love of God: God is love, so much so that God cannot be understood as solitary and self-contained. God is not the being that exists by itself alone and is self-sufficient, as some philosophers posture. Rather, God is perfect self-giving, all self-abandonment. God wants a world of creatures who love themselves and others, a creation that is a network of relationships, a reality that defines itself through relatedness and solidarity, not through exclusion and isolation. This is why, in a unique way, God is present to us in a creature, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In him God wants to love the whole world and in return be loved by the whole world. All will come to recognize where their centre is and how they can grow into a unity of love.

That is why Francis celebrated the presence of God in this world. For him, God was the humble one, the one who met him in the smallest things: in a child that was born in a stable, in the midst of homelessness and vulnerability of human beings, in their poverty and misery, in their plight caused by an economy and a policy that had come to accept as by-products the existence of refugees and asylum seekers, poor people and lepers. All of us are invited to seek God among the poor, the suffering, all human beings, hungry creatures, the animals. This is the reason why Francis wanted to ask the emperor and all those who exercise political responsibility, to pass laws that took care of the needs of all. Christmas was for him, a challenge to overcome poverty, hunger, - it was the basis for the humanization of the human being.

Christmas finds its continuation in the Eucharist. God is an everyday event of humility. Daily, God descends into a plain piece of bread that people share with one another (Adm 1). God desires that each day people gather in His presence. No one must hold on to his/her selfish



plans; no one should seek only his/her own comfort and settle for a false security, all have to make a new start and venture out into a new relationship with one another, with the whole world. The sea, the fields, earth and sky shall be reconciled and filled with new life. The "blessed communion of Heaven" shall be experienced already here on earth.

Christmas means a daily conversion from the usual order of values, and a radical change in the behaviour of human beings. What is considered as small and insignificant is to be thought of as great; and what appears as great and valuable will be ranked as small and unimportant.

God's thoughts are different from those of human beings. The lepers belong in the center, the powerful have to move out of it. The Franciscan family is to carry into the world the divinely-revolutionary change that Mary praises in her Magnificat.

God is united to this world. And only those who, like God, involve themselves in this world and change its destiny for the better, stand on God's side. The passion and the resurrection are consequences of this basic concept; they are its climax. All who believe in this religion of the Incarnation and witness to it, experience God as powerfully active in history.



Clare of Assisi witnessed in her way to the same mystery of the Incarnation of God. She took up the mystical thought of her friend, Francis, and deepened it. In a letter, Francis defined the faithful as "mothers of God." We can, like Mary, conceive, carry in our heart and body and give

birth to God by good works. Thus we can do our share so that God is really made present in this world, seen and experienced (2EpFid 53). Clare adopted this thought in which her inner experience culminates. She wrote to her friend, Agnes of Prague:

Love Him totally who gave Himself totally for your love. His beauty the sun and moon admire, and of His gifts there is no limit in abundance, preciousness and magnitude. I am speaking of Him who is the Son of the most High, whom the virgin brought to birth and remained a virgin after His birth. Cling to His most sweet Mother who carried a Son whom the heavens could not contain; and yet she carried Him in the little enclosure of her holy womb and held Him on her virginal lap (3LAg 15-19).

The infinitely Great One becomes limited, the Incomprehensible One becomes touchable. Clare used the theme of an ancient hymn to Mary:

*Quem terra, pontus, aethera, Colunt, adorant, praedicant, Trinam regentem machinam Claustrum Mariae bajulat.*

He, whom earth, sea and sky praise, adore and venerate; He, the Lord of all three realms is enclosed in Mary's womb. It is important to reflect for a while on the free self-limiting and self-confining of God. This should become the central thought of the Christian faith. Creation itself is already such an act of self-limitation. God withdraws, as it were, limiting self so that creation may come into being, that an autonomous history, the freedom of human beings may be possible. And when God reveals himself, the Godhead is subject to creation; God is given into the hands of human beings, is touched by them and becomes present in all things and events.



### Clare carried this thought further:

"Indeed, is it not clear that the soul of the faithful person, the most worthy of all creatures because of the grace of God, is greater than heaven itself? For the heavens with the rest of creation cannot contain their Creator. Only the faithful soul is His dwelling place and His throne, and this is possible only through the charity which the wicked do not have. He who is the Truth has said: "Whoever loves me will be loved by My Father and I too shall love him, and we shall come to him and make our dwelling place with him" (Jn 14:21), (3LAg 21-23).

What happened in Mary physically-historically, remains on the mystical-spiritual level a real possibility for every believing Christian: the Incarnation of God, the in-dwelling of God in the human person. Thus Clare wrote to Agnes:

Therefore, as the glorious Virgin of virgins carried Christ materially in her body, you, too, by following in his footprints (cf. 1 Pet 2:21), especially those of poverty and humility, can, without any doubt, always carry Him spiritually in your chaste and virginal body; and you will hold Him by whom you and all things are held together (cf Wis 1:7; Col 1:17), thus possessing that which, in comparison with the other transitory possessions of this world, you will possess more securely (3LAg 24-26).



## 2.5. The Perspective of the Third Order

Francis starts his letter to the sisters and brothers of the Third Order with this mystical view, just as if he wanted to say, this is what you sisters and brothers are to carry into the world everywhere: God has become one "with the real flesh of our humanity and frailty" once and for all. There is no misery, no powerlessness, no need that would have nothing to do with God. The poor are the addressees of God's love. This love is unconditional and without limit; every Eucharist is proof of this, every crucifix points to it; this is the basic idea that should shape the Third Order, but also the First and the Second. As different as they be, the Incarnation of God is the uniting motive for all, a fascinating perspective. In order to enable everyone to verify this, the whole text is quoted here literally.

Through His angel, St. Gabriel, the most high Father in heaven announced this Word of the Father so worthy, so holy and glorious in the womb of the holy and glorious virgin Mary, from which He received the flesh of our humanity and our frailty. Though He was rich beyond all other things (2 Cor 8:9), in this world He, together with the most blessed Virgin, His mother, willed to choose poverty. And, as the passion drew near, He celebrated the Passover with His disciples and, taking bread, gave thanks, and blessed and broke it, saying: "Take and eat: This is my Body" (Mt 26:26). And taking the cup He said: "This is My Blood of the new covenant which will be shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). Then He prayed to His Father, saying: "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me" (Lk 22:42). And His sweat became as drops of blood falling to the ground (Lk 22:44). Nonetheless He placed His will at the will of the Father, saying: "Father, let Your will be done" (Mt 26:42); "not as I will, but as You will" (Mt 26:39). And the will of the Father was such that His blessed and glorious Son whom He gave to us and who was born for us, should,

through His own blood, offer Himself as a sacrifice and oblation on the altar of the cross: not for Himself through whom all things were made (cf Jn 1:3), but for our sins, leaving us an example that we should follow in his footprints (cf 1 Pet 2:21). And the Father wills that all of us should be saved through Him and that we receive Him with our pure heart and chaste body. But there are few who wish to receive Him and be saved by Him, although His yoke is sweet and His burden is light (cf Mt 11:30), (2EpFid 4-15)



## 2.6. The Call to Mission

Therefore, the call to mission that Francis included in his Rule - he was the first to include a chapter on mission in a Rule - is not written for clerics primarily, but for brothers (and, we can conclude, also for sisters) who are not priests. Francis sees the preaching of lay people as the normal way of proclamation "among the Saracens." If we compare the structure of the "sermon" (RegNB 21) to which he encourages the lay people, with the ideas of the missionary statute (RegNB 16,6ff), we see that they are similar. In other words "among the Saracens" meant that in other cultures, in mission territories, as they were called in former times, the sermon preached by a lay person was done in a different social context. The preaching of lay people was directed towards the sacraments that need to be administered by priests. But according to Francis, preaching was the primary and basic task of the Friars Minor and, we may include, today, also all the sisters and brothers to whichever community they might belong. This becomes even clearer when we look at the whole passage:

As for the brothers who go, they can live spiritually (among the Saracens and nonbelievers) in two ways. One way is not to engage in arguments and disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake (1 Pet 2:13) and to acknowledge that they are Christians. Another way is to proclaim the word of God when they see that it pleases the Lord (RegNB 16,5ff).

This understanding of mission is simply revolutionary, even if Franciscan communities have not fully understood and practiced it yet. What matters is being present. Is this not a distant echo of the promise of God:

I am the I-am-here (Ex 3:14)? or, to say it in terms of the New Testament, does this not witness to God having taken on our human nature with all that this involves? It is all about subordination, about the acceptance of human beings and their culture, and of creation in general. What counts is being, being present to one another in a way that does not become the cause of quarrels, disputes, even of war. It is about the dynamism of the Incarnate God at whose birth the angels sang the song of peace on earth. This is fundamentally secular, "worldly," because it re-enacts the Incarnation of God, God's coming into this world, the self-renunciation of love which means a total rejection of power. This is the fundamental task of a Christian, first of the laity and then also of the clergy.

## 3. Evangelization

### The Franciscan Movement as Vanguard

"Evangelisation," as we call it today, can mean nothing else but this witnessing to the Incarnate God in all the areas of the world.

In the official announcement of the Vatican Council (Humanae Salutis, 25 December 1961) Pope John XXIII says:

If anything is demanded of the Church today, it is this: that she brings mankind in contact with the imperishable, life-giving and divine power of the Gospel.

In Bahia, the Council of the Order of Friars Minor has defined the place of the Franciscan movement within the Church in exceptionally bold terms:

As Friars Minor, then, we are called to be "an evangelizing vanguard" in a Church which must



be continually reincarnated and renewed. Accordingly, we must be especially alert and sensitive to the movements of the Holy Spirit, both within and without the Church. Besides ministering to the faithful we see a need to reach out into our societies to those yet un-touched by the Gospel and to those alienated from the Gospel as traditionally presented (Bahia 1983, 17).

Of course, this determination of role is not designed, in the narrow sense, for the friars alone but for all people, lay and religious, who look to Francis and Clare of Assisi for inspiration. One should read that quotation very attentively. The Franciscan movement belongs in the Church, but not on the side of those who wish to go along well-trodden paths or do not want to admit anything other than what has been tried and tested.

The Church, therefore, faces a challenge from the world. The Church wishes to venture into new territories in the spirit of the Council. In order to do that, the Church needs pioneers, people whose

hearts are ready for risk, for boldness, for experiment, a vanguard that the Church can follow in confidence. The Franciscan movement has to share in this task; this is in agreement with the role of the Orders as they understand themselves and also with its own history.

The Franciscan movement also has demands made upon it from the outside. What Jesuit Peter Lippert said in 1927, long before the Second Vatican Council, is surely even more appropriate for today, reflecting as it does the expectations of our own period:

The principle that led, through Benedict to Dominic and on to Ignatius, to the organization of more recent congregations seems to be nearing the term of its inner possibilities of development. This does not mean to say, of course, that it will ever be superfluous or

replaceable. But a fundamentally new guideline, sought for by so many, and experimented in new foundations, especially today, can probably be found on a quite different track, namely that of the primitive Franciscan ideal: unhampered vivaciousness in agree community of love, that expresses itself spontaneously without being forced into the mould of prescriptions and ordinances, developing personalities according to their own essential nature, both vital and original, obeying their own inmost law of discipline and self-command. If God should grace His Church one day with the Order of the future, for which so many of the best are yearning today, then it will probably bear the imprint of St Francis' inspiration (Lippert 11).

Another Jesuit has taken up these words and asso-iated them with the achievements and the insights gained during the Second Vatican Council. Mario von Galli, in his book *Living our Future: Francis of Assisi and the Church Tomorrow*, maintains that Francis of Assisi has been the secret theme of the Council and that the Church has taken the path of Francis.

General expectations made of the Franciscan movement are obvious from these testimonies. However, specific interests of our own times could well be added, too:

**The Peace Movement:** Many who are engaged in it find their inspiration in Francis and expect the Franciscan movement to make the Franciscan ideal effective for today.

**The Church of the Poor:** Many who are engaged all over the world for a poor "Church of the Poor" like to remember Francis and look to him as their model. They expect people who have chosen for themselves a life-style according to Francis to be ranked among their pioneers.

**The Environmental Movement:** Groups committed to the preservation of an environment fit for people to live in, declare that only Francis of Assisi can create the religious preconditions



for the world to survive. They expect a wholehearted response from the Franciscan movement.

One could go on listing movements dedicated to dialogue, to mission, to fraternal encounter with different cultures that seek to influence society to contemplation... The roster can be extended indefinitely. Yet, Francis has something to say to each and every one of them, and the Franciscan movement has something to contribute to them all.

The Franciscan movement must once again return in spirit to its wellsprings. It must drink from the sources out of which it sprang. For this reason we are offering this course, for we want to be what we must be - witnesses to God's Incarnation in this world, an evangelizing vanguard.

## D. Exercises

In the biography of Stephen Hawking, an outstanding scientist of our time, we read:

If nothing else, religion is a very personal matter. Are the leaders of the various Churches any more knowledgeable about the origin and meaning of life than a scientist? Why should Stephen Hawking be any less competent to talk about God than anybody else - or even the Pope, come to that? Were the men of God right to sentence Galileo to end his years in solitary misery? Were they right to burn Giordano Bruno at the stake for daring to propose a contrary view of the universe? Have all the religious wars of human history, with their accompanying terror and misery, been justifiable? Has organized religion been competent in those circumstances? (White, M/ Gribbin, J.: Stephen Hawking. A Life in Science. Penguin Books, 1992).

## Questions

1. Who is competent to talk about God?
2. Comment on the statements of this text.
3. What competence do you have to talk about God?
4. What would you say to these remarks from Francis' and Clare's point of view?
5. What should religion look like for you? Where do you find it?

Compare the two following hymns:

What aspects can you see that reveal differing concepts of how the Church sees herself?

a) A traditional English hymn:

Who is She that stands triumphant,  
Rock of strength upon the Rock,  
like some city crowned with turrets,  
Braving storm and earthquake shock?

(Catholic Hymnal for England and Wales,  
Burns Oates & Washbourne)

b) A Song of Brazilian Christian Communities:

The People of the Lord are on their way,  
They march through the desert,  
At the head of the column - their leader.  
They are lacking wealth and possessions.  
But hope is there, on the dusty path ahead.  
We are Your People, Lord, on our way to You.  
We rely on You and are unafraid!  
The People of the Lord were often seduced.



They were tempted to break the Law of Love.  
Fervent in prayer, yet prone to complaining,

They begged for forgiveness and renewed their  
promise.

We are Your People, Lord, on our way to You.  
forgive us, if on occasion our faith is flagging.

Your People, Lord, have known hunger too,

Until You gave them bread from Heaven.

It restores their strength to continue the quest,  
Jubilant, because revived by Your love.

We are Your People, Lord, on our way to You.

You are our food on this weary journey.

Your People, O Lord, have seen from afar

The promised land, gift of Your love.

Our mouth sings your praise,

The desert sands re-echo our thankful prayers.

We are Your People, Lord, on our way to You.

And day by day we draw nearer to our goal.

### Questions

1. How would you explain the differences  
between these two texts?
2. Which image of God is behind these texts?  
How would you characterize the kind of religion  
that is behind  
(a) how about the one behind (b)????
3. What is your own reflection on it?

### Exercise

A Dialog between Reason and St Augustine:  
REASON: so, what do you want to know?  
AUGUSTINE: All that I am praying for. REASON:

Summarize it briefly. AUGUSTINE: To know  
God and the soul, this is my desire. REASON:  
Nothing else? AUGUSTINE: Nothing but that.

1. In what way(s) could this be a dialog of  
Francis? In what way(s) not?
2. Which role does the body, the world, and  
other people play in this text? What is your  
reflection on it?
3. Compose a dialog between Reason and  
Francis, in which creation and other human  
beings find a place!

### Exercise

Read the following texts:

1. From *Evangelii Praecones*, "The Heralds of the  
Gospel" by Pope Pius XII, 2 June 1951:

The work that has still to be done, demands a  
tremendous effort and countless workers. Let us  
consider the fact that our brothers, who "sit in  
darkness and gloom, "are an innumerable  
number of people, perhaps one billion!  
Therefore the inexpressible cry of pain of the  
suffering Lord Jesus Christ still seems to resound:  
"I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I  
must bring them also, and they will heed my  
voice. So there will be one flock, one  
shepherd"(Jn 10: 16).

2. From *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, "On the  
Evangelization of the People of our Time" by  
Pope Paul VI, 8 December 1975:

Nr 4: Evangelization poses three burning  
questions which the 1974 Synod kept constantly  
in mind:

In our day, what has happened to that hidden  
energy of the Good News, which is able to have  
a powerful effect on man's conscience?



To what extent and in what way is that evangelical force capable of really transforming the people of this century?

What methods should be followed in order that the power of the Gospel may have its effect?

Nr 19: Strata of humanity which are transformed: for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.

Nr 20: What matters is to evangelise man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et spes*, always taking the person as one's starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

Nr 21: Above all, the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness. Take a Christian or a handful of Christians who, in the midst of their own community, show their capacity for understanding and acceptance, their sharing of life and destiny with other people, their solidarity with the efforts of all for whatever is noble and good... Through this wordless witness these Christians stir up irresistible questions in the hearts of those who see how they live: Why are they like this? Why do they live in this way? What or who is it that inspires them? Why are they in our midst? Such a witness is already a silent proclamation of the Good News and a very powerful and effective one. Here we have an initial act of evangelization. All Christians are called to this witness.

The apostolic writing of Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is regarded as the "Magna Charta" of the missionary activity of the Church.

It is the fruit and the summary of the Roman Bishops' Synod 1974 in which the bishops of the Southern hemisphere formed the majority.

3. From Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, 4 March, 1979:

Nr 14: Man, in the full meaning of his existence, of his personal and at the same time community-oriented and social being-in the family, on the level of society and in so many different kinds of environment, in his own nation or perhaps only within his own clan or tribe, finally also within the whole of mankind: this human being is the first way the Church has to follow in fulfillment of her task. This human being is the first and fundamental way of the Church, a way that Christ himself has outlined and that leads inevitably through the mystery of the incarnation and redemption.

This human being is the way of the Church and it leads along the base of all those ways on which the Church is journeying; for every man and woman without exception has been redeemed by Christ. Christ is united in one way or another with every human being, without any exception, even if that person is not aware of it. "Christ who died and rose from the dead for all, gives every human being all the time individually and all together - light and strength through his Spirit so that they may be able to live up to their highest vocation.

4. From Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, 7 December, 1990:

Nr 31: The Lord Jesus sent his Apostles to every person, people and place on earth. In the Apostles the Church received a universal mission-one which knows no boundaries-which involves the communication of salvation in its integrity according to that fullness of life which



Christ came to bring (see In 10:10). The Church was "sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all people and nations."

The mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity. First, there is the missionary activity which we call *missio ad gentes*, in reference to the opening words of the Council's Decree on this subject. This is one of the Church's fundamental activities: it is essential and never-ending. The Church in fact, "cannot withdraw from her permanent mission of bringing the Gospel to the multitudes-the millions and millions of men and women-who as yet do not know Christ the Redeemer of humanity. In a specific way this is the missionary work which Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church."

### Questions:

1. What is new in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* when compared to the traditional understanding of "mission?"
2. Why does Pope Paul use the word "evangelization" instead of "mission?"
3. Is it possible to trace the development of these documents in the magisterium of the Church?

## E. Applications

### 1. Application

1. Describe in words or diagrams: the problems of the present-day world, the problems of your own country, the problems of your own region.

How can we, as a Franciscan community, respond to the call of the world?

What would this look like on a world-wide scale?

Write, paint or dramatize a dream, a vision of this.

2. Where do you see signs that the Orders are the evangelizing vanguard of the Church?
3. Sing together hymns and songs that express the new image of the Church.
4. Work together to compose a new hymn.
5. What significance does the term "evangelizing" have for you now after having studied this lesson unit?

