

Charlie McCarron: **Action and contemplation in the early Franciscan sources**
(Monday morning)

A photo of the inside of Grand Central Station, New York –example of busyness, all day, non-stop. Franciscans are called to be people of prayer: So how did the first Franciscans make this balance between action and contemplation?

Key concepts:

Solitude, fraternity (hard to find another word that holds the tradition), simplicity, rhythm of the day, creation (relationship with creation is the context of our prayer); 'strive to be like him' – Clare's model of lectio – 'be transformed into the image of the Godhead itself.

There were some early eremitical influences that preceded and were contemporary with Francis. We are much more rigid in the ways in which we group people – but earlier years of the tradition were more fluid

There was a movement of apostolic hermits, pre-Francis, ie wandering preaching hermits who sought to live the gospel, and lived very, very simply, such as St Stephen of Muret, who wrote things that could easily be mistaken as being by St Francis. The hermits were not monastics, but came from a tradition that valued prayer through the day.

St Romuald (c. 950-1025– founder of Camaldolese Hermits. Their hermitages were to be small, no more than 10 brothers, as poverty is easier to live in small groups than in large ones. They had a church/ oratory for corporate prayer and shared kitchen/dining place, but spent most of their days alone in their cells, scattered around the common buildings – as in the style of the laura, of the desert fathers in Egypt in the 4th- 5th centuries. This style of hermit living became popular in Ireland, eg at Skelleg Michael. Their mission of the hermits, was to spread love. The Camaldolese talk of 'The Triple Good', which is Koinonia (community), solitude, and evangelisation (originally martyrdom). Five missionary Camaldolese were martyred in 12th (ie c. 100 yrs before Francis) For them, the desire for martyrdom was the same as evangelisation.

Francis used to go to the Camaldolese monastery Mt Subasio for retreat.

Another influence on Francis was the early desert tradition. Thomas of Celano says that Francis took Anthony of Egypt as his model. The tau cross in the 13th century was known as the cross of St Anthony of Egypt.

At the Portiuncula, Francis and the brothers built the site like a hermitage, with the church in the centre, and huts around in a circle, and an enclosure made out of hedge or wattle and mud; the cells were also made out of wattle and mud. So this was a laura – ie in the pattern of desert fathers and mothers. Francis wanted Portiuncula to be always a hermitage, but later that ideal got lost.

Other places where the early brothers lived in hermitages were less clear regarding the laura pattern, eg La Verna, Greccio, La Celle at Cortona, and the Carceri, where they used clefts in the rocks and caves. Later, buildings were constructed into the rock face. Wherever they were, they were to be careful not to make any buildings their own.

At the time of Francis, the hermitages were the houses of the friars, showing that prayer had a significant place in their life. When Francis wanted help to discern if his vocation was to preach or spend most of his time in prayer, the two people he asked were Sylvester (in a hermitage) and Clare (in enclosure), which demonstrated how much he valued this life. Francis then, he continued to be a hermit some of the time, probably something like between 50% and 75% of his time was spent in hermitages.

Francis wrote, 'In the love of God, I beg of all my brothers – those who preach, pray or work, cleric or lay... to strive to humble themselves..' – ie those who are preachers, or pray-ers or workers; so as well as everyone incorporating prayer into their lives, some brothers were called to spend more of their time in prayer. We know from the civil documents of Assisi that many of the bridges around Assisi were built by friars in the 13th who were architects and engineers – 'workers'. Clare had no problem with enclosure, or she would have objected in some way, as she did other things esp poverty; enclosure enabled her to give more space for prayer. Prayer and action could go together, eg Francis praying for devils of Arzreo to be driven out.

Today's writings: Franciscan balance: contemplation, community and missional action. So this is a bubbling up of the same values in the 12th century, that are very Franciscan, as well as Camaldolese.

Our Anglican orders 'run the gamut' between prayer and work. It is important (Charlie says) to foster our relationship with creation as part of our prayer. We can do this by growing our food, and some flowers (Francis encouraged the brothers to grow flowers), and simply getting to know the created world around us. In the cities, this might mean valuing a pot plant on the windowsill, or a rock in a public park. Nature surrounds us. We also have a relationship with other creatures, something that was typical of saints, from Francis befriending the wolf at Gubbio to St Jerome (an irascible man) not being afraid of the lion that had a thorn in its paw, so Jerome removed it (and the lion became his friend).

In medieval art, we most often see Francis as a hermit or desert saint, and Francis the pray-er. Jerome and Francis are paired the most often of any saints in medieval art, as both were considered to be desert fathers. The skull is also in many paintings of Francis, 'remember your death'. The other saint often represented with Francis is Anthony of Egypt.

What were the tertiaries doing while the Franciscan brothers were working out their way of life?

Much the same thing – had a habit, without a hood as they did not live in community. Were in hermitages, also – many of the early saints in the Third Order were anchorites, hermits, and recluses.

Franciscan action and contemplation must be incorporated some way into a Franciscan way of life.

Charlie McCarron: **Origins of the orders** (Tuesday morning)

SSF – we are together more like TOR – Based on the concepts of the Order of Penitents - had same rule as Seculars, with ‘tweaks’ for those in community – ie including people living in community in town or outside of town sometimes with the same Guardian; people who lived in their own homes.

Our *Principles* were not written as Franciscan *Principles*, but later it was recognised that the *Principles* were Franciscan in ethos. They are Christian and Hindu (Indian) in origin.

The Principles: what do they (or what did) they say?

They were written by Jack Winslow. Jack was a great missionary; he founded Christa Seva Sangha on the basis of a vision that he had, its main purpose being evangelism. The Christian ashram movement was already in existence by the early 20th century, mostly Roman Catholic, and mostly the ones founded by monastics survived, incl the one that Bede Griffiths (an English man) joined.

Prayer was foundational to the Christian ashrams, and from it flowed service.

‘Bhakti’ is something you are, not something you do. It reflects the indwelling Christ Like the Camaldolese, a community of pray-ers who were evangelists, Indian culture has wandering holy men and women, so the Christians in India also formed a movement like it in order to evangelise in Christ’s name, showing the love of God

‘Bhakti’ – concept from Hinduism and also Sufism in India – meaning to give yourself totally to the love of God; devotion.

Christians who found a dry, intellectual faith in the missionary movement in India, introduced ‘Christa Bhakti’ or the ‘Bhakti of Christ’, to Indian Christianity. Sadhu Sundar Singh was first great leader of the Christian Bhakti movement. He made a lot of travels to the West. At one point, in India, he met Jack Winslow, who asked his advice. Sundar said that the ashram should be on the edge of the city, not the centre, so that people had to really want to go there.

Rev Narayan Vaman Tilak, an Indian poet/musician and a significant person in the Christian Bhakti movement, was also known to Jack Winslow, and Jack wrote a biography of Tilak. One of Tilak’s sayings was that ‘serving people is serving God’.

The original Principles of Christa Seva Sangha use the phrase ‘Servants of Christ’ as the way of talking of religious; similar to Francis, talking about the brothers as servants.

‘Bhakti’ is a complex concept. It includes a recognition of our love of God and God’s love for us, and devotion; but it is about a relationship deeper and broader than prayer, encompassing all that we do; it is described as effortless, ‘most effortless path as it is the path of love’, and recognises everything that is around me has its source in the love of God.

Image of the swan on the lake with a lotus flower:

The lotus coming out of the mud is Karma yoga -the path of service and action (work)

The swan on the water is 'dnyana' yoga - study and meditation/ reflection – the purpose of meditation is to grow in Bhakti
The Sun is Bhakti – without the sun, the plant and the swan would not exist.

The Principles describe 'the three ways of service': prayer, study, work.
But they are not all equal – Bhakti / prayer is foundational, and if you take that out, the rest will collapse.

Bede Griffiths – Charlie says that he is a good writer, and comes from the same base as Jack Winslow with the Christian and Indian concepts intertwining.

Francis talks about prayer and devotion as two separate things.
'aids to devotion' – in our *Principles* – help us to live the *Principles*.
'do not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion to which all temporal things are subservient'. – Francis in the Rule (chap 5?) and Letter to Anthony of Padua
Cf - Bhakti – love of God and God's love for us; devotion

Bonaventure – mystic – love of God/ heart of Christ – important part of Franciscan spirituality, including for Anglicans. It is visible in The Society of the Divine Compassion, the first Anglican Franciscan order; also, Fr Joseph, founder of the (Episcopal) Order of St Francis in USA, had a great devotion to Sacred Heart of Jesus (ie to the Divine Compassion).

Absorbeat - Possibly a prayer of St Francis – 'May the power of your love, Lord Christ, fiery and sweet as honey, so absorb our hearts as to withdraw them from all that is under heaven. Grant that we may be ready to die for love of your love, as you died for love of our love.' ('Absorbeat' is in *Omnibus of Sources*', but not in the sources by Esser Catjetan as he did not find it in Francis' writings).

Bonaventure – 'inflamed with desires [for the love of God]' – study and scholarship for Franciscans cannot be divorced from love. Bonaventure at the end of *Itinerarium* (7.6)– 'If you ask how such things are to come about, ask grace, not doctrine; desire, not intellect; the groaning of prayer and not studious reading; the Spouse, not the teacher; God, not a human being, darkness not clarity; not light, but the fire that inflames totally that carries one into God through spiritual fervour' This is an example of Bhakti at the heart of action.

Charlie's wish for us: a blessing from John O'Donohue -the *Blessing for Longing*.

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