

Trinity, Incarnation and the End of Time; Writing Biographies of individuals and communities; Journeys of compassion, of mission, of facing danger, of planting new communities, and for study.



Some will find it encouraging to watch a video account of a 12 day pilgrimage made by three modern walkers along a route that St. Francis would have followed from La Verna in Tuscany (near Florence) down to Poggio Bustone, in the Rieti valley, a hermitage high in the hills where St. Francis composed his Rule:

YouTube: Oriano Rinaldo, [‘tre pellegrini...sui passi di Francesco’](#) (18:06 mins).

Musical accompaniment for studying the Franciscan sources can be had from RoseEnsemble.org. On YouTube, selections from their recordings at: The Rose Ensemble, [‘Il Poverello \(Medieval and Renaissance Music for St. Francis of Assisi\)’](#) including “Laudar Vollio – Laudario di Cortona (13th C)’; ‘Stabat Mater – Gregorian Chant’; ‘Ghaetta -14th century Italian’; ‘Saltarello – 14th century Italian’; ‘Petit Riense – 15th century Ballo Francese’; ‘Beatus Franciscus – Jérónimo de Aliseda (1548-1591).

How Much Can We Discover?

Some of St. Francis’ writings can be found in various places on internet websites. His ‘Testament’ and his ‘Canticle of the Sun’ can both be found on:

www.legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-lives.html

This website has an enormous amount of medieval material, but not really very much from Franciscans. There were two Lives of St. Francis written by Thomas of Celano, for instance, but what is provided here is just a potted summary from the two very different Lives, called ‘Two Lives of St. Francis’ from Celano. Compare this short piece with the two actual Lives as they occur in FA:ED, and ask why so much has been left out. FA:ED contains letters, prayers and admonitions from Francis, as well as the two versions of the Rule. Read all of this (in vol. 1) then enjoy a musical setting of the ‘Canticle’, such as, on YouTube ‘Hennig Westercamp, ‘Sonnengesang des Franz von Assisi.’’ Other accounts of St. Francis life and message will also feel unsatisfactory. We have to ask ourselves what is missing. Try this questioning as you listen on *YouTube* to - ‘Ananda Assisi, ‘The Life of St. Francis.’’ (25.51 mins).

Now look for some more substantial accounts on www.FranciscanTradition.org where you can listen to four lecturers giving videotaped talks on ‘Spirituality of Francis and Clare of Assisi’ (Bill

Short, OFM); 'Francis of Assisi: History, Significance and Resources' (Regis Armstrong); The Origins of the Christmas Crib (Greg Friedman); and 'St. Francis and the Crusades' (Dominic Monti). This website also has a page of articles which you can download and read offline, by able scholars such as Zachary Hayes. Texts by Francis and Clare can be read for free, by registering.

If you are able to read Latin, you can not only read Celano's two Lives in FA:ED, but compare these translations with the original on <http://archive.org/details/stfrancisassisi00rosegoog.pdf> a document of 447 pages! Like some other items on Internet Archive it comes from Harvard College Library. It is out of copyright and thus available to download. But it is wiser to stay with the English in FA:ED, which is a translation based on comparing a number of Latin manuscripts. Less reliable are versions in Portuguese or Spanish on www.franciscan-archive.org

Therefore it is important to be able to get hold of what the best recent scholars have clarified. An overview of the three volumes of FA:ED can be found in Noel Muscat's website:

<http://www.i-tau.com/franstudies/> and amongst the download PDFs on here there is also an excellent article on St. Bonaventure's theology. Bonaventure was both a biographer of St. Francis and a theologian. How much theology do you think St. Francis knew? This is a serious question! He wrote about the gospel Beatitudes, for instance, but so did his early companion Br. Giles of Assisi. Br. Giles became well-known for turning up at a town in the early morning and asking out loud, who needs water here? Fetching water was his way of getting some bread to eat. A poem has been written about this and set to music - Philip Rostek, 'dawn in Rieti, Giles carrying water' (You Tube). But we also have a good collection of interesting sayings by Giles, which can be read in N. Vian ed., I. Sullivan tr., *Golden Words*. He was not as naïve as first impressions suggest. Try to find out more about Giles from encyclopaedias (or, if you are a linguist, from *Dictionnaire de la Spiritualité*).

Why Do Scholars Become Franciscans?

St. Bonaventure rewrote a lot of incidents and memories recorded in the Lives of Francis from Thomas of Celano, to appeal to religious academics and scholars. This was already a large, growing group of people by the middle of the thirteenth century. One of the best books on St. Francis' theology is Thaddée Matura, *Francis of Assisi: The Message in His Writings*, P. Barrett trans. (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1997). If you are interested to read a certain amount of philosophy and theology alongside spirituality, this would be a good place to start. You could then make a jump of forty years from Francis' last years (when he did his writing) to the Major Life of St. Francis (*Legenda major*) by Bonaventure, and notice how other writings by Bonaventure seem to fit well alongside that very carefully worded biography.

Bonaventure's *Major Life* is also in the FA:ED collection (vol. 2). Some of his other writings are available in www.franciscan-archive.org/bonaventura/ such as the Latin text of the *Legenda major*, and his theological homily 'Christ the One Teacher of All' and his spiritual philosophy, 'The Mind's Road to God'. But sometimes it seems that the links are not working well. The French translations appear to be the most reliable for downloading.

Academic guides to St. Bonaventure can be read online from two viewpoints:

www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_author/.../st_bonaventure

www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/bonaventure/

Books in Italian are listed and available for sale from

<http://www.libreriafrancescana.it/index.php?ln=2#2> Topics include Scotus, Clare, Bonaventure, Lull, and Olivi.

www.muse.jhu.edu>Browse>Religion>Christianity provides a free downloadable version of K. Osborne's introductory text, *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition* (2003). This is published by the Commission for the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition. D. Monti's account of that Commission can be read on <https://www.hnp.org/franciscan-intellectual-tradition-project-progress/>

There is plenty of demanding reading from serious academics available, but it is a good idea to look for ways to ensure you connect with the dynamism of the Franciscan movement, with the interplay between its simpler gatherings and its studious members. For instance, we can test our sensitivity to the earthy hardships involved and to the gifts of joy, celebration and mercy by watching two films: [YouTube] lamisfh, 'Anthony of Padua full movie' [or Antonio Guerriero Di Dio, by Antonio Belluco] [1:38:05].

[YouTube] foo barus, 'The Flowers of St. Francis (francesco giullare di dio)(1950)' [from Istituto Rossellini] [1:23:08].

Both of these films have English subtitles. Which of the many lives of St. Francis might have been most accurately registered by Rossellini's script? What feeling for religious community values and beliefs, and what image of God or God's Spirit, do we take away from these movies?



What Makes Some Readings of the Charism Unsatisfactory?

Symbolism was important to St. Francis, and also to St. Clare. Both of the movies just mentioned help us to realise that poverty was a difficult reality, which Franciscans accepted because it made them able to be strongly committed to the call of Christ. It symbolised willingness to take up the cross of a compassionate way of life. It also symbolised becoming powerless in a society where too many Christians had power and used it ruthlessly. So having a horse or the weapons of a knight could be regarded as a distortion of Christian ideals. But the stories we read do mention people whose lives are protected by the feudal privileges of status, including Church prelates. Francis sometimes encourages conversion away from this security, but at other times he simply uses song

and prayer which celebrate the created world as God's gift to all. How do we make sense of this combination for our own time? Was he an ecologist, or a pacifist, or a gospel preacher?

Do a Google image search of some Franciscan topics, such as 'St. Francis preaching', 'Franciscans in a ship', 'St. Clare praying', 'St. Anthony of Padua and the ass', 'St. Anthony and the fishes', 'St. Bonaventure at the Council of Lyons', 'St. Francis and the Wolf'. Make notes about how each image contains a message for you. You can also add to this by listening to a couple of pieces of music: [You Tube] Carlo Tedeschi, 'Liszt: Cantico del Sol' (15:35).

eusebus, 'Liszt: Légende no. 1, St. Francis of Assisi preaching to the birds' (10:34).

Artists and musicians tend to focus in on one text or incident in the Franciscan sources, so they are very selective. Preaching to the birds is given a much gentler treatment than the Canticle of Sir Brother Sun by Liszt. Why would he think of Francis altering his interaction with the world on different occasions? Perhaps it was because God's forgiveness is such a powerful factor in the Canticle. But what factors were important in preaching to the birds, and what makes this Christian? A lot remains unclear unless we read more. The birds could be a symbol of Pentecost, all the world's peoples gathering to hear the message of God's love, for instance. How would this connect listeners to the death and resurrection of Jesus, to the Cross and to Eucharist?

What Francis and Clare shared was a theology of Cross and Eucharist. These were central. But we shall only realise this if we read their writings and compare them. They can be found together, not in FA:ED, but in R. Armstrong and I. Brady trans., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982). Our Distance Learning texts concentrate on achieving a better appreciation of the social context of Francis and Clare of Assisi, and their desire for a shared gospel language. From that basis it is possible to get further with questions about how well that version of the gospel language of peace-making, for instance, was expanded by Thomas of Celano, by St. Bonaventure, by Julian and Caesarius of Speyer, or by diplomatic missionaries like John of Plano Carpini, Giles of Assisi, Ramon Lull and others. Giles wanted to live St. Francis' rule differently from Bonaventure, asking 'What has Assisi to do with Paris?' Some therefore want to defend Bonaventure, but perhaps not in a satisfactory way. See whether you agree or not with Kevin Hughes of Villanova University: [YouTube] 'Between Paris and Assisi: Bonaventure, Franciscan Scholar and Saint' [59:36].

Others use ecology as an indication that Francis and Bonaventure both care about creation. See whether you agree with Ilia Delio at St. Jerome University (The Ignatius Lecture) on this approach: [YouTube] 'Rethinking Catholicity in an Evolving World' [one item in T. Whiting's 'Theology' section].

To picture the lively debates in medieval Umbria, look at 'Assisi Web': Santo Stephano and the Rivotorto pigsty are a glimpse of the 13th century. Most other images show what has been put in place in later centuries: www.assisiweb.com/index_en.html ; also register to see <http://www.skylinewebcams.com/en/webcam/italia/umbria/perugia/piazza-del-comune-assisi.html> for current character of Assisi. Also <http://www.digitalfranciscans.com/> gives many kinds of present-day Franciscan activities, some slightly connecting, some strongly with the original movement and charism. For instance, <http://tamingthewolf.com/> is about an institute training peacemakers and the skills of conflict resolution. Yet the story of Francis and the wolf of Gubbio was only recorded in *The Little Flowers*, a century after St. Francis died. For careful historical detail, see more at 'The Franciscan Experience' <http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/fra/FRALife3.html>