3. Poverty

Incipit speculatio pauperis in deserto: 'Here begins the reflection of a poor man in the desert.' These words constitute the title governing all the chapters that comprise the *Itinerarium*. What did Bonaventure mean by this assertion, and how might it have been received by his contemporaries, inside and beyond the Franciscan movement? For the concept of poverty in Christianity was highly contested in the Western Church of the thirteenth century. What does Christian poverty as a vocation actually mean? How did Bonaventure approach this question as Minister General of the Franciscans?

It is a repeated paradox at the heart of Christian monastic life that something that starts as an ascetic endeavour by a few holy people, often in great poverty, can become rapidly a well-endowed institution attracting many followers, taking its formal place within the structure of Church and society, for good and ill. Francis and his early companions adopted a radical interpretation of poverty, initially living without any possessions or fixed abode, travelling barefoot and with no forward provisions, in literal fulfilment of the commandment of Jesus to his immediate disciples.[1] The two 'rules' associated with Francis were clear about the essential and fundamental commitment to poverty, but ambiguous as to its practical meaning in all circumstances, many of which could hardly have been anticipated in his lifetime.[2] Pope Gregory IX, who had been close to Francis as cardinal protector since 1220, began the process of regularising the life of the Order as a reforming movement within the Church in the years between 1230 and 1237. He addressed the legitimacy of learning as the necessary foundation for effective preaching, and also made the distinction between the 'use' and 'possession' of necessities, which could now be held in trust for the Franciscans by others. Ambivalence towards learning and storing the necessities of

life was compounded as the Franciscan Order grew. It became dominated by clergy, many of them well-educated, and it faced the inevitable and growing practical considerations of housing and educational needs across Europe, to say nothing of the enthusiasm and generosity of lay patrons. Inevitably, the Franciscans also attracted some whose commitment to poverty was skin-deep and thus abuses arose, which provoked serious criticism. How could the genuine Franciscan ethos of poverty be defined and maintained?

The presence of the mendicant orders within the University of Paris, where Bonaventure taught in the first part of his life and ministry, also provoked mounting resentment for two reasons. Firstly, because both the Franciscans and the Dominicans claimed exemption from the authority of the university by appealing to the Pope, also attracting and teaching students at a cheaper rate than the secular masters. Secondly, because their mendicant way of life was perceived by many critics as dubious and even parasitic upon the life of the Church, often undermining the just expectations of the existing clergy by attracting huge audiences and drawing burial and other fees and endowments, sometimes to the detriment of local churches. In 1256, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas had to rise to the highly articulate challenge posed by William of Saint-Amour and his followers. This is the context for Bonaventure's first systematic discussion of the meaning of poverty in his learned treatise entitled *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*.[3] As a result of the remonstrance by Aquinas and Bonaventure and others, Pope Alexander IV condemned William of Saint-Amour and upheld the integrity of the mendicant orders within the life of the Church, and also their autonomy within the university. In Bonaventure's treatise, however, consideration of the meaning of poverty was carefully set within the classical context of the other monastic vows of obedience and chastity: it avoided overt polemic.

Disputes about the meaning of the vocation to poverty also swirled within the Franciscan movement itself, becoming aggravated by the tendency of some who adopted a more radical interpretation of its meaning, in the original spirit of Francis himself and in expectation of the new age of God's kingdom that was eagerly anticipated by many.[4] In due time, after the death of Bonaventure in 1274 and despite his best efforts, these

Franciscans, who called themselves 'spiritual men', would protest against the institutionalisation of Francis' legacy, which was the inevitable consequence of Bonaventure's leadership and the practical reforms which had preceded his rule, resulting in bitter divisions and conflict for many years within the Franciscan movement. Bonaventure's official *Life of St Francis*,[5] commissioned by the Order even before he became Minister General in 1257 and published by 1263, was therefore a serious and careful attempt to distil the essential spiritual genius of Francis in terms that would command respect and unity among his followers; it is notable that Bonaventure mentions 'poverty' 167 times in his *Life of St Francis*. It would also commend the Franciscan way of life to the wider Church, and it proved to be a popular and highly influential work for many centuries thereafter.

It is in this context that the distinct ethos of the *Constitutions of Narbonne*,[6] issued in 1260 to the entire Franciscan Order under Bonaventure's direction, need to be seen. These constituted a collation by Bonaventure of all the earlier elements of regulation into an ordered body of material, very clear and practical in its provisions, which became the common heart of Franciscan life. The *Life of St Francis* by Bonaventure proved exemplary in its presentation by demonstrating how the memory of the saint's life and teaching conformed to what was now the common ethos of Franciscan life. Bonaventure's *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*[7] was also designed to underpin this interpretation of poverty, anchoring Franciscan preaching and practice firmly in the text of the Gospel by seeing Francis strictly in its light.

Further conflict about the validity of poverty arose in 1268, when the Franciscan way of life was again challenged by some clergy in the University of Paris, led by Gerard of Abbeville. This provoked Bonaventure to compose his most complete consideration of the meaning of poverty, the *Defence of the Mendicants*, published in 1268.[8] As Etienne Gilson says, 'What Francis had simply felt and lived, Bonaventure was to think: and thanks to the organising power of his genius, the interior effusions of the *Poverello* were to be given shape as his thought.'[9] Within this framework of interpretation, many other writings of Bonaventure also intimate his own understanding of the spiritual legacy of Francis, and of the inner spiritual meaning of Christian poverty which a lifestyle of external poverty should signify; this belief lay at the heart of Bonaventure's spiritual theology.

Letters of Direction

There is a lovely letter which Bonaventure wrote to the Poor Sisters in Assisi who were the disciples of Clare, while he was on retreat at La Verna in 1259, where he also composed the *Itinerarium*.[10] The memory of Clare was still green: she had died in 1253, and two years later was canonised by Pope Alexander IV. Bonaventure's letter is an important insight into his own debt to her, which appears considerable, and also his sympathy and respect for the women followers of Francis, who did not always get the support that they needed from male Franciscans. Many of the ways in which Clare developed her spiritual theology, with its roots in the memory and teaching of Francis, anticipated those of Bonaventure and probably influenced him significantly. On 3 October 1260, Bonaventure was present at the translation of the body of Clare to the new church in Assisi built in her honour and where it reposes today. The tone and content of Bonaventure's brief letter is very close to that of the fourth and final letter of Clare herself to Agnes of Prague.[11]

Bonaventure writes that Christian poverty of spirit is that of a virgin seeking marriage to Christ the heavenly Bridegroom. This purity of intention should determine the way in which the 'poor crucified Christ' is followed day by day. In language drawn from the Song of Songs, the Sisters of Clare were bidden by Bonaventure to 'hasten after the fragrance of his blood'.[12] If they do this, they will become filled with the 'fragrance of Christ' himself.[13] He describes poverty here as a mirror for the soul, inspiring humility, endurance and obedience. It reveals the truth that 'we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves'.[14] The sign of spiritual poverty is overflowing love and joy, the fitting response to Christ's 'burning passion with which he loved you'; the Sisters are called to 'cling to Christ as our everlasting good'. As they receive the Eucharist, they participate already in the heavenly banquet in which Christ himself is the Bread of Life, the slain Lamb, the fish 'broiled on the Cross and cooked on the fire of his love'. In the words of von Balthasar, 'the nuptial poverty of the Cross reveals the heart of God'.[15] The Sisters of Clare are therefore bidden to become 'enkindled by the fire of divine love', and to give their hearts 'totally to the one who on the Cross offered himself to God the Father for us'. This is one of the most succinct statements by Bonaventure of his teaching about the nature of spiritual poverty.

An earlier letter, written perhaps in 1254 or 1255 while Bonaventure was still teaching in Paris, was addressed to an unknown academic priest considering whether to join the Franciscan movement or the Dominicans. He was probably an Englishman, possibly John Pecham from Oxford, who duly became a Franciscan and later Archbishop of Canterbury.[16] Bonaventure had to address three areas of concern raised by his enquirer that were also the focus of controversy at the time for critics of the mendicant life: the nature of poverty; the place of manual labour; and the role of learning within the Franciscan rule. Criticism revolved around the fact that Franciscans had access to material resources by means of trustees, resulting in buildings and churches, some of which were becoming lavish. Not all brethren actually engaged in any kind of labour, not even copying books for themselves. Should Franciscans be engaged in academic teaching and writing at all? How could the title 'Master' be squared with the Lord's command to avoid such a practice, if Franciscans were actually following to the letter the example of Christ?[17]

For Bonaventure, these were legitimate questions in themselves, but not always fair criticisms of Franciscan life. He points out first that any poor person may receive alms unless he or she wants to die of starvation, which is hardly a Christian goal. It may be more appropriate for such gifts to be given indirectly, however, in the form of money as well as gifts in kind; such benefactions remain the property of the donors. The Franciscans have accepted such indirect giving by using trustees, so that at no time would any gifts become their immediate personal property. Bonaventure cited the authority of Pope Gregory IX, who had sanctioned such an arrangement in his decree *Quo elongati*, given in 1230 at the request of the Franciscans.

With regard to the diligent use of books, the Franciscans have a vocation to preach. Without diligent learning they would remain ignorant of the Bible and become purveyors of fables instead. They also need books for their prayers. None of this is inconsistent with the spirit of the teaching of Francis provided that the distinction is made and upheld between 'possession' and 'use'. The books as such belong neither to individuals nor to the Franciscan Order as a whole. If they belong to anyone at all, they belong formally to the Pope as their protector, who has entrusted them for pastoral use at the discretion of the leaders of the movement, who cannot alienate or sell them, and who can remove them from individuals at any time.[18]

The same principle applies to the property in which Franciscans live and worship. It still remains the possession of those who donated it for the use of the Order. If this is not so in certain cases, 'the indiscretion of one should not be twisted to the condemnation of all'. Franciscans should not regard any place as 'home' in a fixed sense, for they are pilgrims seeking their heavenly homeland: where they happen to live is a 'halfway house'. But they are not called to be wanderers and vagabonds. There were plenty of such groups in Europe at that time claiming religious motivation and justification.

Francis himself had addressed the commitment to manual labour; in his rule, only those disposed to work in this way should do so. Bonaventure believed that 'he put small value on manual labour as such, except as a means of avoiding idleness'.[19] The priority for all was the life of prayer. Nonetheless the Franciscan way of life entailed much hard labour – study, care of the sick, household chores and so forth, including begging when necessary, or taking casual employment as manual labourers.

Clergy who were Franciscans were duty bound to continue their learning, whereas uneducated lay brethren should not aspire to it, following the instruction of Francis himself. Nevertheless, Francis set an example by the way in which he mastered the Bible as a result of his own prayers and reading. He respected greatly clergy who were theologians and became Franciscans, however, and on one occasion he divided up a New Testament into sections so that different brethren could read it without conflict. In this spirit Francis surely accepted the role of teachers like Bonaventure himself, as he had endorsed the preaching and teaching ministry of Anthony of Padua. The Lord condemned in the Gospel the ambition and pretension so often sought by educated clergy; but in the Sermon on the Mount, he commends those who keep and *teach* his commandments.[20] Thus, the office of the teacher is indispensable and highly important within Christianity, but only if it is governed by inner humility and poverty of spirit.

What should Franciscan clergy study in the university? This was a moot point at the time and Bonaventure condemned mere curiosity and speculation. He defended, however, the selective use of the writings of philosophers, like Aristotle, pointing out that: 'people can hardly reap grain without chaff, or the divine Word without human words. These are separated, however, by the fire of compunction and devotion, which winnows the grain

of truth from the chaff of mere verbiage.'[21] This is a striking image, characteristic of Bonaventure, which undermines any human self-confidence in learning apart from elucidating the revealed truth of Scripture. In defence of this approach, which was his own, Bonaventure adduced the example of Augustine, who firmly believed that Scripture could not be understood without familiarity with wider learning.[22] Alongside the philosophers, however, and in preference to them Bonaventure placed the saints as the more reliable teachers of Christian truth.

Among the Franciscans, no one was compelled to study, but nor were uneducated brethren to be despised. Bonaventure saw in the way the movement had moved from comprising 'simple and unlettered' people to including learned teachers a mirror of the New Testament itself. The reason he was himself drawn to 'love Francis's way of life so much was that it is exactly like the origin and perfection of the Church itself, which began first with simple fishermen and afterwards developed to include the most illustrious and learned teachers'.[23] This development was truly providential, being the work of Christ himself. As a consequence, Bonaventure defended the rule of Francis as 'perfect, moderate, and wisely given . . . being the law of the Gospel in an abbreviated form'.[24] This is a very striking personal testimony, as well as a governing principle throughout his theological writing and teaching.

Shortly after authorising the *Constitutions of Narbonne* in 1260, Bonaventure composed a short treatise of guidance for Franciscan novices.[25] It distils well-established monastic practice and patristic wisdom and concludes with a fine analysis of the spiritual significance of poverty and how to attain it as the goal of religious life. Reiterating the opening statement of the *Constitutions*, Bonaventure asserted unequivocally that 'voluntary poverty is the primary foundation of the whole spiritual edifice'.[26] He urged the strictest discipline in relation to things, permitting only necessities: 'If you do not want to be turned away from heaven, always strive to be poor on earth.' Only meditation on the reality and promise of heaven can protect a soul from valuing transitory things in the wrong way.[27] Discerning consistently what is truly necessary is therefore a key principle, 'fearing lest what seems necessary is really superfluous'. This applies even to small things: so 'only keep in the cell what is truly necessary', for the love of small things can choke the soul like sand. Bonaventure

identifies spiritual poverty with divine wisdom as described in Proverbs 3:13-19: it requires lifetime effort and perseverance to attain it. Twice he cites in this conclusion the Lord's words in the Sermon on the Mount, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.'[28] Such poverty of spirit flows only from humility: but the deeper the humility, the higher the glory that can be raised upon it.

Defence of the Mendicants

It is in his *Defence of the Mendicants* that Bonaventure provides his most complete and mature exposition of the significance of a vocation to actual poverty within the life of the Church.[29] This is openly a work of polemic; but it is also a masterpiece of biblical and patristic exposition, revealing the great range of his learning, as well as his own spiritual and pastoral experience. He regarded the reopening of the controversy by Gerard of Abbeville as quite unforgivable, both for disparaging a sustained renewal of Christian life across Europe and for flouting the verdict of the Papacy given over a decade earlier. For Bonaventure had no doubts about the 'plenary power conferred the Vicar of Christ' in matters of faith and morals.[30] He regarded Gerard's tract as an assault on evangelical perfection, its defences, its foundations and the sincerity of its practitioners. He would now compose a fourfold rebuttal, and each point would have three aspects to it. This is characteristic of Bonaventure's analytical approach to expounding theology.

Bonaventure identifies four sustained errors within Gerard's tract: a patronising attitude towards austerity and fasting, as appropriate only to imperfect Christians; a defence of flight from persecution; a theology of prosperity, thus slighting the poor; and a wholesale assault on the credibility and probity of the mendicant orders along the same lines as William of Saint-Amour before him. Fleeing effectively from the teaching of the Beatitudes, the writer 'proclaims those perfect and blessed who flee persecution, avoid fasting, accumulate possessions, and attain high honours'. Such an attitude befits not a doctor but a detractor. The implication is that a Christian may act contrary at times to the example of Christ, who by his condescension set an example of humility to be followed by all. Bonaventure rebuts Gerard's specious interpretation by citing the teachings of

Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Gregory the Great and Hugh of Saint-Victor. Thus, if Christ and his disciples had a common purse, it was an act of accommodation to human weakness; it is therefore more praiseworthy to do without one altogether. After careful analysis of how 'perfect' and 'imperfect' are used differently according to nature, circumstance and in themselves, Bonaventure concludes that, even if some of the external actions of Jesus were apparently 'imperfect', for example, fearing death or experiencing hunger, his inner love and person made the act perfect: 'Christ is more sublime because more merciful. . . . Christ remains superior to any other human being, even the most perfect.'[31] He is the supreme exemplar, whose compassionate condescension reveals the love of God and makes it accessible.

Central to the whole argument was what it means actually to follow Christ. Critical to Bonaventure's argument was the proper interpretation of the Gospels: 'It is clear that, just as Christ spoke words that were proportioned to those who received them, he used the example of himself in the same way.'[32] Close examination of Bonaventure's masterly commentary on Luke's gospel reveals this same principle of careful discernment in action.[33] Restraint and proportion are the hallmarks of all Christ's teaching and activity, because this reflects the way in which divine wisdom enables those who seek it to ascend to the 'summit of perfection'. Thus, to give up all possessions is a perfect act, if sustained over time; but to follow Christ appropriately is a demanding challenge which may take many and varied forms. Christ's example is twofold: eternal, and also expressed in time. Just as the diversity of creation expresses the manifold creative wisdom of God the Word, so in the Church there are varied vocations and ministries, no one of which wholly reflects the mystery of Christ.

Christ is therefore the 'exemplar and origin of our whole salvation'.[34] Some of his actions in the Gospels spring from his innate power, others from his illuminating wisdom; some express his severe judgement, others the dignity of his priestly office. Some of his behaviour condescends to human weakness and frailty, preparing the way, however, for revealing the perfect life. This is expressed by voluntary poverty and virginity, obedience to God and others, vigilant prayer marked by intercession for enemies and persecutors, and ultimately self-sacrifice in love upon the Cross. Only this last vocation, as counselled by Christ, is appropriate for emulation by his followers seeking perfection.

Meanwhile, even imperfection in Christian life may become preparatory for perfection because that goal is the greater good. So, for example, marriage may be less perfect in some ways than virginity but it stands in no need of forgiveness or disparagement, for it has its own charism and vocation within Christianity on the authority of Christ in the Gospels.[35] Like Gregory the Great before him, Bonaventure recognised that Christian life is very much seeking perfection in the midst of imperfection: Christian perfection is more a process of becoming than a finished state.[36]

For Bonaventure, Christian perfection was essentially an ascent in love, from obedience to the divine commandments, through willing self-sacrifice in response to the counsels of Christ, to the final goal which is contemplation of the vision of God. The phrase 'evangelical perfection' applies to the second intermediate state. In reality this means avoiding evil, seeking good and bearing with adversity.[37] In this way the blandishments of the world, described in 1 John 2:16 as 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life', may be consistently repudiated. For these temptations, manifest in the temptations of Jesus himself in the Gospel account, represent a turning away from the eternal goodness of God and the values that flow from Him. Christ's advice to relinquish all possessions, all self-will and to embrace sexual continence, is the perfect antidote to this lure of the world, the root of evil that leads so many astray.[38] The measure of this 'evangelical perfection', however, is whether love of neighbour extends to love of enemies; and the fruit of such a life is mystical vision through the ecstasy of divine love. The test of this commitment is found in the willing acceptance of suffering and trials, even seeking them out for the love of God revealed in Christ; and such 'perfect love casts out fear'.[39] Bonaventure demonstrates how the Beatitudes address every step of this ascent of love.

Bonaventure cites the teaching of Francis, which laid the foundation of obedience, poverty, and chastity, and upon it built further counsels that would embody the Spirit of the Lord: prayer with a pure heart, humility, patience in affliction and love of enemies. 'In the first three, the perfect man is crucified to the world; in the next three he is made to conform to God: like a six-winged seraph, he is elevated above the things of the world and carried aloft to the divine.' The seraphic charism of the stigmata marked Francis as a perfect example of the perfection of the

Gospel, a clear sign given by Christ of the way back to him.[40] Obedience and virtue are therefore the essential foundations of Christ-like perfection. The sacrifice of the will to God, something that is 'a priceless good, most beloved and personal', is therefore 'perfect, complete and supremely acceptable to Him'.[41] Once again Bonaventure corroborates this fundamental principle and truth with explicit teaching from Augustine, Anselm and Gregory the Great; and also Bernard.[42] The monastic vow therefore expresses this ultimate and complete self-offering, although Bonaventure is very realistic and honest about the difficulties and obstacles confronting this path and its proper expression in Christian life and worship. Nonetheless, the consecration of the will is the key to conversion and sanctification.

After clarifying the Christian response to persecution and the nature of fasting and its purpose within Christianity, Bonaventure devotes great care to establishing the foundations of the vocation to voluntary poverty. He distils and applies the line of approach he took in his earlier *Disputed Questions on Evangelical Perfection*. The foundation of Christianity is Christ himself, apprehended by faith and love and expressed by 'faith working through love'.[43] The contrary principle that too often governs human life is covetousness, bred from insecurity and the assertion of pride.[44] Christ's preaching on poverty and way of life directly challenges this fatal attitude and is its antidote. For covetousness must be uprooted spiritually and materially.[45] It is for this reason that poverty of spirit is the foundation of all Christian perfection.[46] As Jesus said explicitly to the rich young man in the Gospel, 'If you would be perfect, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor . . . then come and follow me.'[47] Christian dispossession does not mean not using what is strictly necessary for life, however; and it may take the form either of poverty supported by community life, as in a monastery, or complete reliance on the benevolence of others, like the mendicant orders. The first form of life takes its cue from the Early Church in the Acts of the Apostles.[48] The second form of life was sanctioned by Christ himself in the course of his ministry, when he sent out his disciples without money, provisions, extra clothing, sandals or staff:[49] 'In their deeds and manner of life they would set before them holy poverty as the standard of perfection.'[50] There is, moreover, no evidence in the Gospels that Jesus himself had any fixed abode. Bonaventure supports his argument once again with teaching

drawn from Chrysostom, Jerome, Bernard and Anselm. He paints a characteristically Franciscan picture of the poverty of Jesus who died naked on the Cross:

> Christ was poor at his birth, poor during all the time of his life, and poor at the end. In order to make poverty lovable to the world, he chose a mother most poor, wilfully suffered the pains of poverty, and went about unshod as a person destitute and without resources.[51]

The standard set by Christ is therefore an absolute one for his followers, and the apostles lived accordingly. The key principle is expressed in the words of Jesus: 'freely you have received, freely give'.[52] Everything is in fact a gift from God and human beings possess nothing as of right. Bonaventure supports this insistent interpretation with the teaching of Ambrose and Bede among others, for he was saying nothing new in Christianity: 'A life of extreme poverty, lacking goods and riches, is a work of perfection and the safest way best conformed to the crucified Christ.'[53] Bonaventure also cites Paul, who reminded his Corinthian hearers of the grace of Christ, who being rich became poor for our sakes, so that by his poverty we might become rich.[54] Paul also experienced destitution in the course of his ministry.

After quoting a wide panoply of Church fathers, Bonaventure concludes that literal imitation of Christ and his apostles is 'permissible, praiseworthy and perfect' within the life of the Christian Church. Such a life is a sign and a standard for all Christians, most of whom may be unable to aspire to it, but who may judge their lives and values by it. It is a sacramental way of life within the Church inasmuch as it demonstrates the reality and nearness of the Kingdom of God. There is no justification at all, however, in despising a virtue in another person not possessed by oneself. The principle of spiritual poverty is something that all Christians should pursue and live by, whereas the life of actual poverty is a specific vocation that must be freely assumed.[55] Christ's counsel did not preclude receiving necessary alms, however, in order to live. The important truth is that: 'there are many levels in nakedness: for there is a distinction between nakedness of the heart, and nakedness of the heart and body. Nakedness of the heart comes from the spiritual stripping

away of every perverse attachment of greed and desire.' Here words of Paul spring to mind: 'I may give all I possess to the needy, I may give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I gain nothing by it.'[56] For true self-giving love is the goal of spiritual poverty.

Nonetheless, Bonaventure discerns three levels of actual nakedness of heart and body as ways of Christian life: the rejection of superfluous possessions and possessiveness which pertains to all clergy, and indeed to all Christians; surrendering any claim to ownership and submitting the personal will to others, as in a monastic community; an apostolic life of complete penury and dependence, as lived by the Franciscans. All this is a direct challenge to the love of wealth and addiction to possessions that is so evident in human society everywhere. Those who would be perfect before Christ, whoever they are, must cut off the slightest inclination to possess anything: they must repudiate the lure of wealth. Then they will discover as a liberation what Augustine describes as 'a whole world of riches belonging to the faithful'.[57] For a sense of Providence is the antidote to covetousness, which is anyway a false security. Affluence should not be seen as a desirable goal in Christianity nor a sign of divine blessing; for when Christ and his disciples used a common purse, it was out of practical necessity. It was also a reassurance to those weak in faith, a rebuke to those whose false asceticism would condemn such practicality, and a sign to the perfect to share all in common in the service of the Gospel. Bonaventure devotes a great deal of time to this discussion of the proper use of money in Christianity, drawing in a wide range of patristic and monastic authorities in order to clarify the Church's thinking and practice. Here is his conclusion:

> Christ remained in a state of poverty and yet did not condemn the state of wealth as such, conforming himself to those who possessed money, while perfectly preserving the form of perfect poverty. . . . The purse of Christ therefore may not be used as an incentive to greed, but as an example of piety and poverty. . . . In order to inflame us with love for perfect poverty, when Christ entered the world . . . he came as the poorest, from the poorest mother . . . all his life was a road of poverty . . . so let us bear insults from our enemies in the name of the poor and crucified Christ.[58]

Bonaventure believed that such a life of poverty advanced Christian faith and proclaimed the Gospel authentically. This was, of course, a central preoccupation for him in leading and guiding the Franciscan Order. The humility of Jesus was the key, washing his disciples' feet so that 'he could induce them to practice the humility he had shown'.[59] The action of humility should lead to true humility of heart, while voluntary poverty may be described as the pearl of great price of the Gospel, for which everything else has to be sold in order to attain it.[60] Voluntary physical poverty can have a cleansing effect on the soul, purging away past sins and false values, and preventing occasions for pride and sin that are caused by the love and possession of wealth. The destitution of such assumed poverty should lead to simpler and deeper virtues, as in the case of the poor widow who offered her last coins in the temple.[61] From such simplicity springs inner joy rooted in trust in God alone. In support of his argument, Bonaventure cites extensively from the teaching of Chrysostom and Bernard.

He also believed that the power of example set by voluntary poverty made the Gospel message far more credible, effective and acceptable, especially to the poor themselves: 'The evident sign of this is the fact that evangelical truth was spread throughout the world by apostles who were poor in possessions and in spirit, and few in number.'[62] Such now are the humble followers of Francis and Clare, and they deserve the generous support of the Church in their witness and life of service and compassion among many poor people in society. In words taken from Jerome, echoing the Lord's teaching in the Gospels, Christians are called 'to clothe Christ in the poor, to visit him in the sick, to feed him in the needy, to shelter him in the homeless, and especially within the household of faith'.[63] In that sense, those who accept voluntary poverty identify with and champion those many people whose poverty is harshly inflicted upon them, among whom Christ came to live and die.