**ST FRANCIS, A RELIGIOUS MAN**

Many people nowadays centre their religion exclusively on their relationship to other people. They seem to emphasize love of neighbour to the neglect of love of God. They seem to think along the lines of this creed: “We are saved not by the intensity of our private love for God nor by devotion to the sacraments or to self-denial. We are saved by the degree to which we create new community in the world.”

They appear to have lost their belief in God as the Gospels and the Church understand God to be: God who surpasses this world but who gives ample evidence of himself in his creation. They don’t see God who reveals himself as the prime object of love and worship, and who extends to us a share in his own divine life.

For these people, “salvation” is a movement towards a more *human* existence. “Heaven” is a better *earth* brought about by our active concern for one another. “Grace” is a genuine human love and an ample share in *human* life.

Humanizing and secularizing Christians differ from committed secular social workers in one thing: they claim to find the basis of their thought in the spirit of Vatican II as they interpret it.

They seem to overlook the word of God. Our Lord expressed himself very clearly: “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second resembles it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” (Matt 22:37)

Vatican II described the Christian man as religious, aware of his God-given dignity and consequent obligations. It proposed his prime obligation as worship and adoration of God, inseparable from the necessity of active concern for one’s fellows.

St Francis is outstanding among those who had genuine Christian faith, and who grasped the proper relationship between love of God and love of neighbour.

He has been described simply as a religious man. His *Canticle of Brother Sun* shows this very well. St Francis composed his Canticle when he was blind and broken in health, no longer able to enjoy the world. On the night of his death more than seven centuries ago, he had it sung for him for the last time. We are familiar with the standard translation. Here is a modern rendition:

*Good owner, unlimited and supreme!*

*Beauty, nobility, and worth are utterly yours.*

*All good things issue from you*

*and on your simple supremacy they converge.*

*But no man is capable of fathoming you.*

St Francis clearly distinguished the universe from mankind, and, unlike many moderns, he distinguished both from God. In the universe, he admired the reflection of its Author, but he taught abasement of self as inclined to pride.

He is more relevant today than ever before. All who claim him as their spiritual father and model can offer the Church and our modern society what they need.

Our world is blind with pride. It needs the spiritual insights of the Little Poor Man and his adoration of God who surpasses mere creatures that reflect their Maker all the same.

Our best-intentioned efforts to help the needy, and to better ourselves and our community, need the eyes of St Francis to see with, and his heart to love with.

We, brothers and sisters of St Francis, should give our Church and our society nothing less than that.