Christian humility conceived in terms of lifelong learning: Francis of Assisi & modern Church leadership

Savage, Tom

Awarding institution:
King's College London

The copyright of this thesis rests with the author and no quotation from it or information derived from it may be published without proper acknowledgement.

END USER LICENCE AGREEMENT

Unless another licence is stated on the immediately following page this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International licence. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the work

Under the following conditions:

- Attribution: You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).
- Non Commercial: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- No Derivative Works - You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

Any of these conditions can be waived if you receive permission from the author. Your fair dealings and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
Christian Humility Conceived in Terms of Lifelong Learning: Francis of Assisi & Modern Church Leadership

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology & Religious Studies

12 June 2021

By

Thomas Joel Savage

ID number: 1743105 / K1755127
Date Submitted: 12 June 2021

I hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 93,784 words in length (not including Bibliography and Appendix), has been composed by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. This project was conducted by me at King’s College London from 1 October 2017 to 12 June 2021 towards fulfilment of the requirements of King’s College London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under the supervision of Dr Lydia Schumacher.

Signature of Candidate: 

Date: 12/6/2021
Acknowledgments

For my dear, sweet Wendy
and the life of love and learning
that we have shared for 30 years.

With deep gratitude to Dr Lydia Schumacher -
your faithful mentoring, teaching, kindness, patience
and care over these years of research and writing
exemplify what it means to be an extraordinary
human being and supervisor.

In loving memory of my mother, Jeannette Suzanne Savage
who never tired of hearing about all my crazy adventures,
academic or otherwise.

(22 August 1936 - 10 June 2021)
Abstract

In this thesis, I counteract the modern critiques of Christian humility, whereby scholars have asserted that this moral virtue is self-abasing and thus, inimical and contrary to human flourishing in today’s world and in the church context. I argue for an alternative way to conceive of Christian humility, which is not self-abasing, drawn from a contemporary approach in the field of education, called “lifelong learning”. Lifelong learners are open, collaborate with others, and are willing, if necessary, to let go of their long-held and engrained ideals in exchange for different ways of thinking, which often results in personal and corporate transformation. To show how lifelong learning works, I turn to the medieval saint, Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226), who is well-known for his humility, but not without controversy. Francis started a successful religious order in his day, which he founded upon a radical ideal of poverty that was patterned after the life of Christ in the New Testament. Francis and his followers owned nothing and relied on God and others for their daily subsistence. Francis also practised self-abasement in ways that make him vulnerable to the lingering modern critiques and thus compromise his example of humility. However, I demonstrate using contemporary scholarship, on contextual grounds and in terms of lifelong learning that Francis is, in fact, a good and life-affirming example of Christian humility in how he led his order until his death. This model of humility and lifelong learning has practical implications for the types of leaders that are needed in today’s church context. I conclude that Christian humility, conceived by using concepts from the lifelong learning theory, evades the modern critiques.

Key Words: Christian Humility, Moral Virtue, Francis of Assisi, Lifelong Learning, Christian Leadership
# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................................................. 2
ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................................... 3
TABLE OF CONTENTS .................................................................................................................. 4
TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS .......................................................................................................... 8
INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................. 10
  A RETURN TO VIRTUE STUDY — SHIFTS IN THE FIELD OF MODERN MORAL PHILOSOPHY .... 10
  RECLAIMING HUMILITY FOR USE IN THE MODERN WORLD .................................................. 11
  THESIS OVERVIEW .................................................................................................................... 12
  CHAPTER DIVISIONS & SUMMARIES ......................................................................................... 14

CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTS OF HUMILITY IN PRE-MODERN THOUGHT ............................................. 19
  HUMILITY IN HEBREW THOUGHT ............................................................................................... 19
    Examples in Old Testament Scripture .................................................................................... 19
    Concepts in Rabbinitic Tradition .......................................................................................... 22
  VIRTUE IN GREEK THOUGHT .................................................................................................... 23
    For Plato .................................................................................................................................... 24
    For Aristotle ............................................................................................................................ 24
  CHRISTIAN HUMILITY IN PRE-MODERN THOUGHT ................................................................. 26
    For Augustine ....................................................................................................................... 26
    For the Early Monastics ........................................................................................................ 28
    For the Monastic Orders ....................................................................................................... 30
    For the Mendicants ............................................................................................................... 32
    For Aquinas .......................................................................................................................... 33
    For Ignatius & the Jesuits ...................................................................................................... 35
  SUMMARY & CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................ 36

CHAPTER 2: CRITIQUES OF CHRISTIAN HUMILITY IN MODERN THOUGHT ................................. 38
  HUME’S ASSESSMENT OF THE PASSIONS .................................................................................. 38
  HUME’S CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIAN HUMILITY ........................................................................ 41
  KANT’S SELF-REGARDING DUTIES ............................................................................................ 41
  KANT’S HONEST HUMILITY ..................................................................................................... 43
  NIETZSCHE’S CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIANITY ............................................................................ 44
  NIETZSCHE’S CRITIQUE OF CHRISTIAN HUMILITY ............................................................... 47
  SUMMARY OF THE MODERN CRITIQUES OF CHRISTIAN HUMILITY ..................................... 49

CHAPTER 3: ATTEMPTS AT REHABILITATING CHRISTIAN HUMILITY IN CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT .................................................................................................................. 52
  CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES ............................................................................................... 52
  REVERTING TO PAST THEORIES .............................................................................................. 53
    Louf — The Monastic Ideal .................................................................................................... 54
    Pansters — Franciscan Writings ............................................................................................. 54
    Daley — The Jesuits ............................................................................................................... 56
    Levering — Systematic Theology .......................................................................................... 57
  CRITIQUE OF PAST THEORIES APPROACH ......................................................................... 58
  SEEKING A COMPATIBLE MODEL ............................................................................................. 60
    Pardue — Christian & Biblical Tradition ............................................................................... 61
    Foulcher — Neo-Monasticism ............................................................................................... 64
    Dunnington — Christian Theology and Virtue Theory ......................................................... 66
  CRITIQUE OF MODELS IN THE COMPATIBILIST APPROACH .............................................. 69
    Pardue ..................................................................................................................................... 69
Stigmata, Writings, & Final Testament ................................................................. 148
FRANCIS’S DEATH .................................................................................................... 149
FRANCIS’S CANONISATION ................................................................. 150

CHAPTER 7: FRANCIS’S HUMILITY & LIFELONG LEARNING ........................................... 151
FRANCIS’S TROUBLESOME HUMILITY .................................................................. 151
RECONSIDERING FRANCIS’S HUMILITY ............................................................. 151
Using Contemporary Scholarship ...................................................................... 151
Using Lifelong Learning ................................................................................. 151
FRANCIS’S SELF-ABASING BEHAVIOURS .......................................................... 153
Recap .................................................................................................................. 153
A Counter-Cultural Example ............................................................................ 154
THE ROLE OF LEARNING & THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE ORDER ............. 159
The Traditional Interpretation ......................................................................... 159
A Counter Interpretation .................................................................................. 161
FRANCIS’S LATER YEARS: THE RULES & TESTAMENT .......................................... 164
The Rules: The Traditional Interpretation .......................................................... 164
The Rules: A Counter Interpretation ................................................................. 169
Francis’s Unwavering Loyalty to the Church .................................................... 171
Francis’s Testament: The Traditional Interpretation ....................................... 172
Francis’s Testament: A Counter Interpretation ................................................ 174
Francis’s Human Example ................................................................................. 176
FRANCIS’S HUMILITY IN TERMS OF THE LIFELONG LEARNING THEORY .............. 179

CHAPTER 8: MODERN CHURCH LEadership & Lifelong Learning ...................... 185
THESEs Recap ..................................................................................................... 185
SERVANT LEADERSHIP IN THE MODERN CHURCH CONTEXT ...................... 185
LIFELONG LEARNING — AN ALTERNATIVE TO SERVANT LEADERSHIP ........ 186
AN OVERVIEW OF THE SERVANT LEADERSHIP THEORY ............................. 187
Theoretical Frameworks for Servant Leadership .............................................. 189
Humility & Servant Leadership ....................................................................... 191
Christianising Servant Leadership .................................................................. 193
Servant Leadership in Biblical Studies ............................................................. 195
CRITIQUES OF THE SERVANT LEADERSHIP THEORY ....................................... 197
TWO LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORKS ................................................................. 202
The Industrial Era Paradigm .......................................................................... 202
The Twenty-First Century Paradigm ............................................................... 203
LIFELONG LEARNING — TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY LEADERSHIP ................... 204
SUMMARY & CONCLUSION ............................................................................. 207

CONCLUSION ........................................................................................................ 210

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................... 215
PRIMARY SOURCES ............................................................................................ 215
SECONDARY SOURCES ....................................................................................... 216

APPENDIX: NONRELIGIOUS MODELS OF HUMILITY IN CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT ... 231
INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................... 231
HUMILITY AS CORRECTIVE TO SELF-OTHER COMPARISONS ..................... 231
THE SELF-CORRECTIVE IN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ........................................ 234
HUMILITY AS MODESTY ...................................................................................... 235
Interchangeable – Humility or Modesty .......................................................... 236
Distinctive – Humility and Modesty ................................................................. 237
HUMILITY DERIVED USING POLITICAL THEORY ........................................... 238
HUMILITY DERIVED USING NEO-KANTIAN PHILOSOPHY ................................. 239
HUMILITY DERIVED USING LITERATURE & ART ............................................ 242
### Table of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Primary Source Title and Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Talmud Bavli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BGE</td>
<td><em>Beyond Good and Evil - Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future</em>, Friedrich Nietzsche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Immanuel Kant’s “Lectures” by Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1CEL</td>
<td><em>The Vita Prima</em>, Thomas of Celano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CG</td>
<td><em>City of God</em>, Augustine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONF</td>
<td><em>Confessions</em>, Augustine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSB</td>
<td>Twelve Degrees of Humility and Pride, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Letter, Augustine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM</td>
<td><em>Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals</em>, David Hume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ER</td>
<td><em>Regula non bullata</em> (1221), the Earlier Rule of the Franciscans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GM</td>
<td><em>On the Genealogy of Morality</em>, Friedrich Nietzsche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMM</td>
<td><em>Groundwork of Metaphysics of Morals</em>, Immanuel Kant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GS</td>
<td><em>Gay Science</em>, Friedrich Nietzsche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Immanuel Kant’s “Lectures” by Herder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HM</td>
<td><em>De Humanis Moribus</em>, Anselm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIVCC</td>
<td>Lateran IV Council Canons (1215)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR</td>
<td><em>Regula bullata</em> (1223), the Later Rule of the Franciscans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td><em>Metaphysics of Morals</em>, Immanuel Kant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE</td>
<td><em>Nicomachean Ethics</em>, Aristotle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td><em>Policraticus</em>, John of Salisbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td><em>Apology</em>, Plato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td><em>Laws</em>, Plato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td><em>Republic</em>, Plato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSB</td>
<td><em>Rules of Saint Benedict</em>, Benedict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td><em>Spiritual Exercises</em>, Ignatius of Loyola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td><em>Summa Theologiae</em>, Aquinas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td><em>A Treatise of Human Nature</em>, David Hume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRW</td>
<td><em>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects</em>, Mary Wollstonecraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scripture Abbreviations</strong></td>
<td><strong>Book</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Kgs</td>
<td>II Kings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex.</td>
<td>Exodus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jn.</td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt.</td>
<td>Matthew</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numb.</td>
<td>Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phil.</td>
<td>Philippians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov.</td>
<td>Proverbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeph.</td>
<td>Zephaniah</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Return to Virtue Study — Shifts in the Field of Modern Moral Philosophy

A virtue, as opposed to a vice, is a “desirable moral quality”, which, when practised, has the potential of helping a person experience their “highest good”.¹ The Greeks, like Plato (c. 428-348 BC) and Aristotle (384-322 BC) understood this about the practice of virtue and considered it the only way for humans to flourish (or become excellent) and to achieve eudaimonia for a life of “blessedness, happiness, and prosperity”.² Although this pursuit of the virtuous moral life has been popular for centuries, in the field of contemporary ethics, Elizabeth Anscombe has shown that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, moral philosophers began shifting away from the study and practice of the virtues.³ Instead, philosophers focused their attention on theories like deontology and utilitarianism.⁴ However, this shift in modern moral philosophy was short-lived and

³ G. Elizabeth M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy” (1958) in The Collected Philosophical Papers of G.E.M. Anscombe: Volume III Ethics, Religion and Politics, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1981): 26-42, 32-33, 42. Anscombe writes, “It is left to ... modern moral philosophy ... to construct systems according to which the man who says, ‘We need such-and-such, and will only get it this way’ may be a virtuous character ...” (42).
⁴ Utilitarianism derives the moral life by focusing on the highest degree of usefulness or utility for the largest number of people in society. On a deontological model, the highest moral life consists of performing a moral code or duty which is dictated by God or the natural world, regardless of the foreseeable positive or negative outcomes in the world. It is beyond the scope to discuss and evaluate utilitarianism and deontology. See John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Immanuel Kant, Metaphysics of Morals (MM), in Practical Philosophy, trans. and ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 363-602. See also Geoffrey Scarre, Utilitarianism (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996). Scarre presents a historical genealogy of utilitarianism from the fifth century to the modern era, including the research of Lao Tzu, J.S. Mill and Richard Hare. Scarre critiques utilitarianism and questions its viability for today’s world. See Oskari Kuusela’s reference work, Key Terms in Ethics (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 22ff. C. Stephen Evans explores a type of deontology, called Divine Command Theory in Kierkegaard’s Ethic of Love: Divine Commands and Moral Obligations (Oxford Online Scholarship, 2005), DOI:10.1093/0199272174.001.0001, Accessed 5 February 2020. Evans states, “Divine command theory gives an account of obligation, specifically moral obligation. Any action God commands his human creatures to do is morally binding for them, and any action that is morally obligatory for humans has the status of being a moral obligation because God commands it” (112).
skeptics today have declared that “the virtues are back”\textsuperscript{5} While Alasdair MacIntyre is hopeful about this return to the virtues, called “virtue ethics” in the field of contemporary moral philosophy, he also raises concerns.\textsuperscript{6} For MacIntyre, virtue ethics today embodies “too many different and incompatible conceptions of virtue” to be useful.\textsuperscript{7} MacIntyre contends that the various models that have come forth have resulted in virtue rankings and listings that are complex to the point of “subversive arbitrariness”, which undermines their application when it comes to practising a virtuous life.\textsuperscript{8} To remedy this confusion, MacIntyre argues that the study and practice of traditional Aristotelian virtue theory provide the way out or the best way back for modern moral philosophy.\textsuperscript{9} This shift back to virtue study (Aristotelian or otherwise) provides the rationale behind the recent interest and research regarding the moral virtue of humility.

**Reclaiming Humility for Use in the Modern World**

The moral virtue of humility has a tattered and controversial history. Jeanine Grenberg writes that “humility is a curious virtue with a checkered history”, portrayed in a myriad of ways throughout “literature, philosophy, theology, and art”.\textsuperscript{10} Grenberg underscores the fact that with all these portrayals of humility, “there is little agreement about what exactly it would mean to be humble, and even less about whether it would be a good thing or not.”\textsuperscript{11} Thus, contemporary scholars, across disciplines, are attempting to rethink and redefine the moral virtue in a way that is relevant for today’s world.\textsuperscript{12}

In this regard, biblical scholar, Stephen Pardue writes that “a cursory look at leading journals in a variety of academic disciplines – from the hard sciences to political, analytic, and moral philosophy – reveals that scholars in all of these fields have proposed ...


\textsuperscript{6} It is beyond the scope to enter the debates in current virtue ethics research. For an overview and assessment of the theories and issues at play, see David Carr, James Arthur, and Kristján Kristjánsson, eds., *Varieties of Virtue Ethics* (Springer Publishing, 2017).

\textsuperscript{7} MacIntyre, 1985, 181.

\textsuperscript{8} MacIntyre, 1985, 203.

\textsuperscript{9} MacIntyre, 1985, 259. Note that a readoption of traditional virtue ethics, as MacIntyre and others argue, does not mean an all-out abandonment of duty and utility related to moral theory. Also, I am not implying, nor will I argue that humility is an Aristotelian virtue. I am only pointing out the shift back to the study of virtue in the field of modern moral philosophy which came to include a re-examination of humility.


\textsuperscript{11} Grenberg, 2005, 1.

rehabilitations of humility within the last decade.”

It is to this corpus of rehabilitative texts on Christian humility that I hope to contribute with this thesis.

**Thesis Overview**

Since the fourth and fifth centuries, the practice of Christian humility has centred around notions of self-abasement. Such an understanding of Christian humility persisted throughout pre-modernity and into the Middle Ages. This self-effacing account of humility was eventually critiqued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as outdated and inimical to human flourishing. Modern philosophers like Hume, Kant, and Nietzsche argued that the teaching and practice of Christian humility were culpable in keeping the downtrodden and the marginalised of society pushed down and unable to rise out of their circumstances. These critiques won the day at the time, and continue to influence perceptions of Christian humility in contemporary literature on virtue.

The medieval saint, Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226), is a famous but controversial example of Christian humility. Francis adopted a radical ideal of poverty which he believed was patterned after the life and example of Christ in the gospels of the New Testament. For Francis, this ideal meant that he owned nothing and trusted God and others for his daily subsistence. Inspired by Francis’s life and practices, others soon followed him and took up his ideal of poverty. In 1209, with 12 followers, Francis started a new religious order which enjoyed almost unprecedented success in its day. However, along with his ideal of poverty, Francis practised self-abasing behaviours, which make him vulnerable to the modern critiques of Christian humility, jeopardising his example and

---

13 Pardue, 2013, 3.
16 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (EPM) (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983). Hume argues that Christian humility is a “monkish” virtue that is unnecessary and unpleasant for modern society.
throwing into question whether he is humble in any life affirming sense.\textsuperscript{23}

To resolve these issues, I argue for an alternative way to conceive of Christian humility, which is not self-abasing, and appeases both the modern critiques and Francis’s questionable example. To this end, I draw from a contemporary theory in the field of education, called “lifelong learning”.\textsuperscript{24} A lifelong learner is self-aware, open to the criticisms of others, and willing to evaluate their long-held beliefs and ideals to the point of letting them go, if necessary.\textsuperscript{25} They are flexible and creatively adaptive, using out-of-the-box ways of thinking. Lifelong learners collaborate with others to improve themselves with the hopes of transforming the world around them.\textsuperscript{26} Christian humility understood in this light is not self-abasing but life-affirming.

Using these concepts from the lifelong learning theory as a lens, I then reinterpret Francis’s self-abasing behaviours and some of the controversies that have cast doubt on his example of Christian humility. I demonstrate on contextual grounds, with the support of contemporary scholarship, that Francis showed patterns of lifelong learning in how he lived out his humility which means that he was a positive and life-affirming example of humility in the ways that he led his order. Finally, I explore the implications of Christian humility, interpreted as lifelong learning, as a useful model of modern church leadership which provides an alternative to (or replacement for) a popular, but problematic type of leadership called, servant leadership. As I show, the servant leadership theory is most often associated with the virtue of humility and is rarely critiqued in leadership studies because to do so is akin to heresy since servant leadership is considered the quintessential model that best emulates the humble example of Christ’s leadership.

However, recent studies demonstrate that servant leadership is vulnerable to the same modern critiques that are argued against Christian humility because the theory implies human self-abasement, seems outdated, is perhaps fundamentally flawed, impractical and that which perpetuates gender and minority biases that inhibit human flourishing. Thus, my solution is to think of humble leadership for the church context from the perspective of the lifelong learning theory which helps to alleviate these concerns. I conclude from this study that Christian humility, conceived in terms of lifelong learning, is a necessary and useful moral virtue, which when practised provides a pathway to a person’s human flourishing today.

\textsuperscript{23} Armstrong et al, 1999, 228.


\textsuperscript{26} Margie Pearse and Mary Dunwoody, Learning that Never Ends. Qualities of a Lifelong Learner (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2013), 21ff.
Chapter Divisions & Summaries

To carry out this research, I have devised eight chapters. In chapter one, to introduce the moral virtue of humility and to provide the background needed to understand its history, I explore how humility developed in thought and practice throughout parts of pre-modernity. In chronological fashion, I begin by examining humility as it was conceived by the Hebrews in their Ancient Near Eastern context. For the Hebrews, humility is the central virtue for all good moral interactions because the humble person looks to Yahweh (or God) in dependence on him for help and guidance rather than only trusting in themselves. The Hebrew scriptures and their rabbinic tradition provide a number of human examples of humility, like Moses and King Josiah, whose narratives show how they each feared God and asked for his help and reassurances as they led. Moses and Josiah humbly led the Israelites, which resulted in radical change and renewal during difficult and turbulent times in their history. From here, I turn to the Greeks, like Plato and Aristotle, whose writings and theories about the general study and practice of the virtues are insightful and continue to influence contemporary virtue ethics today.²⁷ I include in this discussion the Greek concept of magnanimity or proper human pride, which is the main context where Greek philosophers allude to a notion of humility.

Next, I examine humility’s Christianisation through the influential thinking and writings of Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Augustine viewed humility as the fundamental virtue of Christian conversion and discipleship because it epitomises Christ’s example, who led in “the way of humility”.²⁸ Augustine’s conception of humility and its centrality for the Christian faith helps to set up my discussion of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, who lived around the same time as Augustine in places like Egypt and Syria. I delineate the ways in which these early monastics (or ascetics) practised and expressed Christian humility. For starters, they lived in long-term isolation in deserts, caves and cemeteries. The Desert Fathers and Mothers practised prolonged and dangerous fasts, self-abasement, and self-imposed humiliations, like nakedness or wearing tattered clothing. These popular ascetic practices of Christian humility were then expanded upon and written into the rules or the juridical documents that guided the monastic orders which followed into the Middle Ages. I conclude the chapter by showing that these self-abasing notions of Christian humility continued well into the sixteenth century. Although some ideas and practices of humility in pre-modernity resisted self-abasing depictions, it was this type of Christian humility that was eventually objected to in the modern era. For example, I will show that Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) provided an internal critique

²⁷ MacIntyre, 1985, 259.
that questioned notions of self-abasement as the defining practice of humility whilst maintaining that the humble person is reliant and dependent on God’s working of inner grace.

In chapter two, I explore Christian humility as it came to be criticised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I delineate the arguments of three influential modern philosophers, who each protested against a self-abasing sort of Christian humility. David Hume (1711-1776), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) respectively called this traditional humility, “monkish”, contrary to human dignity, slavish, and they rejected it as a virtue and argued that it was dangerous for a modern society. I underscore that these external arguments, what I refer to as “the modern critiques”, had a significant impact on perceptions of Christian humility going forward, casting doubt on whether it is good or necessary for today’s world.

In chapter three, I examine two ways that contemporary scholars approach Christian humility in relation to the external modern critiques. Both approaches attempt to reverse or lessen the negative connotations associated with Christian humility, arguing for its necessity in the modern world and in the context of the church. The scholars who take the first approach revert to the old theories of Christian humility as they were defined and practised by the monastic orders in pre-modernity. Researchers using this approach are less concerned about the validity of the modern critiques and more concerned that these critiques have all but erased Christian humility from the world. Thus, models that follow this approach represent a revival of Christian humility as it was once expressed in pre-modernity. In assuming the second approach, scholars are sympathetic to the modern critiques and hope to offer accounts that are less objectionable but that also remain faithful to Christian tradition and theology. In this thesis I seek to contribute to this second approach in the literature by providing an internal critique that assumes the need for a humble person to depend on God but that also offers relief to the external modern critiques. To this end, I first survey and critique some examples from each approach, before highlighting historical precedent for linking humility with learning and thereby offering an introduction to my theory about lifelong learning. I assert that Christian humility conceived in this way promotes human flourishing and resists the modern critiques.

In chapter four, I elucidate the background and concepts of the lifelong learning theory as it is found in contemporary literature in the field of education. A lifelong learner is characterised by

---

29 See, for example, Kari Konkola, “Have We Lost Humility?” *Humanitas* 18.1-2 (2005): 182-207. Konkola surveys a range of biblical commentaries and dictionaries from the seventeenth century to the modern day, highlighting that humility is rarely listed in the most recent sources (cf. 192ff). On this basis, Konkola argues that the moral virtue seems replaced by more modern concerns such as sexual purity and notions of discipleship (199).

self-awareness, an openness to criticisms and the need to improve, flexibility, creative adaptability, and a willingness to collaborate with others for individual and corporate transformation. I contend that attitudes like these provide an innovative framework for conceiving a new way of thinking about Christian humility that is not self-abasing, and thus rendering it immune to the modern critiques. To show how the theory of lifelong learning works, I use it as a lens through which to reconsider and reinterpret Francis of Assisi’s controversial and self-abasing example of Christian humility.

In chapter five, I introduce Francis by outlining the relevant aspects of his high medieval historical context (900-1300). I highlight changes in western Europe, related to economic growth and social mobility within the peasant class, which led to a budding sort of middle class and the growth of cities. Such socio-economic changes led to a need for new and exotic material goods, foreign trade, and a new merchant class who could buy, transport, and sell these goods. I point out that shifts, such as these, were also reflected in the religious life of the period through an increase in materialism and a growing disenchantment and distrust of the local clergy and the papacy. These factors meant that many stopped attending church or showing up for annual confession. Thus, church reforms were needed to draw the faithful back into the religious life of the church. To address these needs, Pope Innocent III (1161-1216) called the Lateran IV Council, which convened in 1215. As I demonstrate, all of these factors converged and helped pave the way for Francis to step on the scene, start his order, and inspire renewal for the church of his day.

In chapter six, I recount his biography in light of the account of historical milieu offered in the previous chapter. I start by elucidating the background and rationale behind the authorship of the primary text (Thomas of Celano’s Vita Prima or First Life, published in 1229 in three Books) that I use to tell Francis’s story through to his canonisation in 1228. This chapter, and the preceding one, provide reference points for my discussion of Francis’s example of humility in chapter seven. In this regard, I intervene in the controversies pertaining to his troublesome humility by reinterpreting these instances through the lens of the lifelong learning theory. I demonstrate an alternative way to view the debated historiography of Francis’s practices and leadership.

31 Chris Wickham, Medieval Europe (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 122-123.
34 Manselli, 1988, 220ff.
I begin by addressing Francis’s self-abasing behaviours. I contend that Francis adapted his lifestyle as a way to follow the example of the incarnate Christ and effectively to draw others to hear the gospel message. I underscore that Francis’s extreme actions not only allowed him to safeguard his own personal ideal of poverty, but they were in keeping with similar practices of other religious groups and movements of the period, which provided an effective and strategic example that went counter to the culture of materialism and spiritual lethargy of the day, bringing needed reform to the ailing church. I also argue for a different way to interpret some of the debated episodes that occurred during Francis’s later years leading up to his death. I demonstrate, based on current research, and then in terms of the lifelong learning theory, that Francis, by grace and dependence on God, was able to let go of the original ideal of poverty that he had envisioned for the order in the early years. For this reason, the order was able to continue as an official religious order of the church with Francis’s blessing before he died. By reconsidering his problematic humility through the interpretative lens of the lifelong learning theory, I conclude that Francis stands out as a positive example of humility in how he led the order.

In chapter eight, I explore the implications of Christian humility that is conceived in terms of the lifelong learning theory by examining a popular model of leadership, called “servant leadership”. Servant leadership was coined in 1970 by businessman, Robert Greenleaf, who wanted to create a model of effective management for his workplace. For Greenleaf, servant leaders are characterised by a nurturing attitude towards their subordinates and employ this as a way to earn trust and then lead their staff to achieve to their highest potential. Since its inception, the servant leadership theory has been adopted and applied by business leaders in companies like AT&T and Southwest Airlines with almost unprecedented success in terms of company growth and employee satisfaction related to their managers and job roles. In contemporary leadership studies, scholars have expanded Greenleaf’s initial concept of servant leadership in attempts to define what a servant leader is by assigning to it characteristics, traits, empirical measures and even virtues. Some scholars have theorised that servant leaders are best characterised by virtues such as humility,

altruism, and love. In the modern church context, biblical scholars and theologians have asserted that servant leadership is synonymous with humble Christian leadership because Christ led in humility as a servant of God. For this reason, the servant leadership theory has become a dominant way to think about and assess humble church leadership. However, some scholars argue that, much like in the case of the modern critiques of Christian humility, the servant leadership theory is problematic, outdated, and has the potential to cause harm when it is applied without thought given to gender, race and minority inequality in today’s world. I conclude my analysis of servant leadership by arguing that lifelong learning provides an alternative model of humble leadership for today’s church, which is practical and promotes human flourishing for everyone.

43 Sharon Drury, Handbook of Leadership Theory for Church Leaders (Vancouver: Regent University, 2003), 21.
Chapter 1: Concepts of Humility in Pre-Modern Thought

This opening chapter traces the development of humility in thought and practice during parts of pre-modernity. I start chronologically by describing the centrality of humility in the writings and thinking of the Hebrews of the Ancient Near East, mentioning their use of human examples to illustrate humility and pride. From here, I examine the Greek understanding and practice of the virtues as found in the works of Plato and Aristotle. While the Greeks had little to say about humility per se, their conception of proper human pride and how a person achieves the virtuous moral life are later critiqued in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354-430). Augustine named humility as the fundamental virtue of the Christian religion because it was exemplified by Christ as he is portrayed throughout the Gospels and in Paul’s Letters (i.e., to the Philippians) and as it came to represent the mark of true Christian discipleship. During roughly the same time as Augustine, I show how the early desert ascetics began practising self-abasement and other extreme forms of Christian humility, which carried over into the monastic orders that followed. Although I distinguish counterexamples in this study (i.e., from Aquinas) which provide an internal critique of such practices, I conclude that by the sixteenth century, Christian humility was predominately associated with self-abasing behaviours. This is important because it helps to set up chapter two where I examine the external critiques argued by influential modern philosophers who oppose self-abasing Christian humility.

Humility in Hebrew Thought

Examples in Old Testament Scripture

In the Hebrew scriptures, humility is depicted as a right disposition towards God, others, and the self – all of which are portrayed by human examples throughout Israel’s historical narrative.45 For example, when Moses led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt, he asked the reigning Pharaoh, “‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before God?’”.46 In order to “humble” himself, Pharaoh needed to acknowledge Yahweh’s power over his own rulership and let the Israelites go as God had commanded him to do through the warnings of Moses. However, Pharaoh did not humble himself which proved disastrous for him, his family and the Egyptians. God eventually delivered the

46 Ex. 10:3, English Standard Version, UK (ESVUK) unless otherwise specified.
Isaiahites from their slavery by making a way for them to pass through the Red Sea on dry land, before Pharaoh’s pursuing army drowned when the waters closed back up again. Pharaoh stands as an example of the Hebrew notion of pride because he refused to humble himself by turning to God and obeying his commands.

In contrast to the Pharaoh’s pride, King Josiah of Judah (reigned 640 to 609 BC) was known for having a “penitent” heart because he “humbled [himself] before the Lord” when the “Book of the Law” (or Torah) was rediscovered at the beginning of his reign. Josiah showed that he understood the authority of God over his own rule and kingship. Josiah instituted needed religious reforms for Israel with the help of the then high priest, Hilkiah. Together, they destroyed pagan altars and re-established Jewish rituals to honour God’s faithfulness. Josiah’s humble disposition towards Yahweh allowed him to rule for thirty-one years without any national disaster. Josiah’s humility set him apart to the extent that “there was no king like him, ... nor did any like him arise after him.” In light of Josiah’s humble example, Hebrew scripture describes humility in terms of “the fear of the Lord”. The humble person fears or reverences God and receives “riches, honour and life”. The “humble of the land” obey God’s commands and “seek righteousness” which results in peace on “the day of the anger of the Lord”. Pride, like Pharaoh, rejects God’s supremacy and results in “destruction”. Humility, like that of Josiah, fears God, acknowledges his power and commands, and results in “honour” and long life.

The greatest human example of humility in Hebrew scripture is Moses, called “more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth”. Such an accolade echoes Plato’s Apology and the Oracle of Delphi who called Socrates (d. 399 BC) the wisest man on earth for admitting the limits of his knowledge. Moses first encounters Yahweh in the desert of Midian where he sees a strange

---

47 Ex. 12ff.
48 2 Kgs. 22:8-11.
49 2 Kgs. 23ff – Josiah reinstituted the Passover (cf. Ex. 9-11).
50 2 Kgs. 22ff.
51 2 Kgs. 23:25.
52 Texts like these are found predominately in the wisdom literature of the Hebrew scriptures, i.e., Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job.
53 Prov. 15:33.
54 Zeph. 2:3.
55 Zeph. 2:3.
56 Num. 12:3.
57 Plato’s Apology (PA), trans. Harold North Fowler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Press, 1914), section 21a, 81. Plato describes the time that his close comrade, Chaerephon “went to Delphi and made so bold as to ask the oracle this question; and, gentlemen, don’t make a disturbance at what I say; for he asked if there were anyone wiser than I. Now the Pythia replied that there was no one wiser” (81).
burning bush, which was not being consumed by the fire. Moses sees this “strange sight” and draws near to it. God speaks, “Moses, Moses … take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground”, Moses replies, “here am I” and then asks “what” it is that is speaking to him. Yahweh replies that he is “I AM”, the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To this, “Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God”. At this moment, Moses’s disposition towards God was one of humility because he feared and worshipped him.

Yahweh then tells Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt – to deliver them out of their centuries of slavery. Moses argues that he is a poor speaker and incapable of helping God’s people. God promises to empower Moses to speak and reassures him through miraculous signs. Moses remains reluctant, asking God to “please send someone else”. Yahweh’s “anger burned against Moses” but he calls Moses’s brother, Aaron to be Moses’s spokesperson. Then, Moses obeys God and trusts him with the outcomes when he leaves his home in Midian and journeys to Egypt. At this point, Moses’s humility showed that he properly understood himself in relation to God – that he could trust God with the future. Moses’s pathway of humble leadership was not a perfect one. He struggled along the way, but in the end, he learned to trust God and became renowned for his humility throughout the whole earth.

---

58 Ex. 3:1-3.
59 Ex. 3:3-4.
60 Ex. 3:4.
61 Ex. 3:6.
62 Ex. 3:6.
63 Ex. 3:11ff.
64 Ex. 4:2ff.
65 Ex. 4:13.
66 Ex. 4:14-16.
67 Moses as an exemplar and case study of humility are replete in the literature. For example, Pardue (2013), as I elucidate in chapter three, invokes and analyses the Mosaic tradition as it is discussed through the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (84ff). See also, George W. Coats, The Moses Tradition (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988) and Moses—Heroic Man, Man of God (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988). Coats defines humility using Moses as an exemplar through the lens of the ancient hero tradition / motif. Also, in W.H. Bellinger’s commentary on Leviticus and Numbers (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), he writes that Moses’s humility, referenced in Num. 12:3, might be defined as ‘self-effacing’, but that in context “it probably indicates Moses’ discipline, integrity, trust and dedication” related to God and the Israelites. Bellinger goes on to argue that the “[Numbers 12:3 passage] should lead us to redefine humility …” (225, italics added). Finally, Eryl W. Davies renders Moses as “a man of honour who dutifully fulfils the responsibility entrusted to him by God” in Numbers: Based on the Revised Standard Version (London: Marshall Pickering, 1995), 120.
Concepts in Rabbinic Tradition

In the rabbinic teaching found in the *Talmud Bavli* (Babylonian Talmud), humility is considered chief among all of the other virtues. In this regard, Ronald Green contends that from the standpoint of Jewish ethics, humility is central because it carries with it the highest moral value without which, all other virtues are impossible to achieve. Green argues that humility’s importance in the moral thinking of the Hebrews rests in their conception of God’s nature. *Yahweh*’s actions and “behaviours” towards his people exemplify humility because of the many benevolences he bestows, such as delivering them from their enemies at the parting of the Red Sea and then giving them the *Torah*.

The teachings of *The Talmud* depict humility and the humble person from four unique perspectives. The first of these is in contrast to the proud. Pride in a person is the disposition that refuses to turn to God for help, while humility in a person helps them to remain open to God, giving them a willingness to acknowledge his supremacy in the world. Second, humility is described in relation to human examples like Moses or a rabbi who are blessed by *Yahweh* because of their humble natures. Third, the *Talmud* presents humility as a communicable virtue which means that a

---

68 *The Babylonian Talmud (B)*, trans. Michael L. Rodkindon (Public Domain, 1918), vols. 1-10. The term *Talmud* is derived from the Hebrew root יָדָע (to learn) and is the generic title applicable to two distinct but closely related anthological literary corpora, namely the *Talmud Bavli*, compiled between the 6th and 7th centuries CE and the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, the Jerusalem Talmud, compiled between the 3rd and 5th centuries CE (Cf. Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, Yehudah Cohn, and Fergus Millar’s chapter on “Talmudic Texts” in *Handbook of Jewish Literature from Late Antiquity*, 135–700 CE (Oxford: British Academy, 2013) in British Academy Scholarship Online, 2014, DOI: 10.5871/bacad/9780197265222.003.0002, Accessed 28 December 2020. References from here will be, Tract Title, p#.


70 Green, 1973, 56. It is beyond the scope to enter debates regarding God’s nature and his divine attributes. See John MacQuarrie’s meditations in *The Humility of God*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster, 1978).

71 Exodus 12-15. See also, Green, 1973, 56. It is beyond the scope to explore these biblical events further. Tom Wright discusses the Passover and the Exodus at length in *The Day the Revolution Began, Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus’s Crucifixion* (Harper Collins, 2016), 170, 178-194. See also, Johanna van Wijk-Bo, *Making Wise the Simple, the Torah in Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

72 B. Erubin, 28.

73 B. Baba Batra, 275 and Aboth, 40. One rabbi mentioned often is Elazar who, because of his humility, was respected and considered capable of answering difficult questions and resolving conflicts (275). This aligns with George N. Schlesinger, “Humility,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 27.3 (Spring 1993): 4-12, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23260818 Accessed: 31-03-2018 16:08 UTC. Schlesinger describes and interviews rabbis in his day and then draws from these a way of understanding humility for the modern world.
humble person typically attracts other humble people, allowing them to build strong and sustainable communities for a flourishing future together. Thus, in Hebraic thinking, the humble person thrives when they work in solidarity with others for mutual moral improvement, which potentially brings about societal change.

Lastly, the Talmud describes a humble person as a “student”. The humble student continually learns, along with others, about the world that Yahweh has created for them to live in and cultivate. King Josiah exemplified humility as a learner when he listened to the words of God’s Law in the Torah. Josiah was open to ideas that were new to him, including the advice from Hilkiah, the priest. Together, they enacted reforms in Israel to bring about change. Josiah feared God and upended the status quo of religious lethargy that had come to characterise the Israelites in his day. Likewise, Moses continuously learned about God’s power and faithfulness as he sought out God’s presence and asked for guidance to lead the people into the Promised Land of Canaan.

**Virtue in Greek Thought**

Unlike for the Hebrews, humility is not considered central in the Greek philosophical tradition, nor is it one of Plato’s four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice. This absence does not necessarily rule out humility in Greek thought. However, there is debate in the scholarship about humility since scholars have argued that the Greeks saw no value in such an idea. I do not contend here that humility is an important moral virtue for the Greeks like it was for the Hebrews. In this discussion, I point out where Plato and Aristotle refer to humility in the context of their framing of the moral life from the pursuit of the virtues. In other words, although

---

74 B.Aboth, 33.
75 B.Aboth, 33.
76 B.Sabbath, 166.
77 B.Sabbath, 166. This notion aligns with the etymology of humility, starting with humus in Latin, which means "earth" (a rich and nutrient-filled soil) and is the root word for human. Humility is derived from the same word, humilitas, or one who is grounded or near to the earth. “Fittingly, the second creation story tells us that humans were created from the earth, soil, humus and given God’s breath of life”. See Brenna Davis, “Humus, Humans and Humility,” The National Catholic Reporter, https://www.ncronline.org/news/earthbeat/humus-humans-and-humility, Accessed 9 November 2020.
78 Plato’s Republic (PR), trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941), Book IV, sections 426-435, 113ff.
79 Dunnington, 2016, 39. See also, Joseph J. McInerney, The Greatness of Humility, St Augustine on Moral Excellence (Cambridge: James Clark & Co, 2017) and Andrew Pinsent’s helpful chapter on “Humility” in Michael W. Austin and R. Douglas Geivett, Being Good: Christian Virtues for Everyday Life (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 242-264. McInerney’s aim is to show compatibility between Augustine’s Christian humility and Greek virtue. He concludes that while there are correlations, the beauty of Christian humility is unmatched. Pinsent gives an analysis of Plato’s Laws (and other sources) to argue that Christian humility encourages the magnanimous life perhaps no less than the virtuous life conceived by the Greeks. Lastly, Dunnington also addresses this in his more recent work – cf. Humility, Pride, and Christian Virtue Theory (Oxford Scholarship Online: February 2018), 11, DOI: 10.1093/9780198818397.001.0001, Accessed 3 March 2019.
the Greeks do not emphasise humility explicitly, I show that implicitly there are notions of humility which form the bedrock of their method because the moral person is the one who constantly learns as they pursue the good life. In this regard, I give attention to the Greek understanding of proper human pride and how they propose achieving magnanimity because these concepts, among others, influence Augustine’s writings and thoughts about humility in the context of Christianity by the fourth and fifth centuries.

**For Plato**

In the *Laws*, Plato mentions humility to illustrate the virtue of justice through the discourse between Athenian and Cleinias.\(^{80}\) Plato declares that god holds “in his hand the beginning, middle, and end of all that is”.\(^{81}\) God moves “in a straight line” towards his own ends, justly punishing those who “fall short of the divine law”.\(^{82}\) Plato describes the just person as the one who holds fast to what they know in “humility and order”.\(^{83}\) For Plato, the humble person, by practising justice, recognises their need for a “guide or ruler”, i.e., the philosopher-king.\(^{84}\) Humility like this opposes pride, what Plato calls “insolence”.\(^{85}\) The prideful person looks to themselves as the only ruler, “elated by [their] wealth or rank, or beauty”, putting too much stock in their youthfulness and advantage.\(^{86}\) Pride on this account, says Plato, leaves a person “deserted” by the ruler and at risk of trusting others with their same insolence, “throwing all things into confusion”.\(^{87}\) Pride then gives way to destruction for the prideful person and others around them.\(^{88}\) Plato concludes that “God ought to be ... the measure of all things”, not humans and most acutely, not solely ourselves.\(^{89}\) Plato’s protégé, Aristotle points to humility in relation to “proper pride”. This Greek conception of pride will influence the writings of Augustine and later the modern moral philosophers who oppose Christian humility as a moral virtue.

**For Aristotle**

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle bases the pursuit of virtue on his conception of what he terms, the “mean”.\(^{90}\) For Aristotle, a thing is “good” as it strikes the mean (or intermediate, the

---

81 *PL IV.716*, 99.
82 *PL IV.716*, 99.
83 *PL IV.716*, 99.
84 *PL IV.716*, 99.
85 *PL IV.716*, 99.
86 *PL IV.716*, 99.
87 *PL IV.716*, 99.
88 *PL IV.716*, 99.
89 *PL IV.716*, 99.
90 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett, 1999), II.8, 1108a15, 27. The *NE* is comprised of ten books. References from here are, book# (I-X), chapter#, Bekker page#, column-letter, line#, page# in Irwin.
standard) between the extremes of “excess” and “deficiency” or defect. Thus, a moral virtue understood in these terms is “neither too much nor too little” A work of art is good because it needs neither something added to it nor something taken away from it. On Aristotle’s account, “excess is a form of failure and so is deficiency” while the ability to determine the appropriate amount is to be “praised”. Similarly, “moral virtue ... is concerned with passions and actions, and in these, there is excess, defect, and the intermediate”. Aristotle’s virtue “must have that quality which aims at the intermediate”. To miss this mean, writes Aristotle, “is easy” – but “to hit it difficult”. Any excess or defect in the pursuit of moral virtue is considered a vice. Aristotle places virtue between the two extremes of vice at the point of “rational” and principled choice. Aristotle clarifies that the feelings associated with the passions, whether in excess or defect, might lead to bad actions, like adultery or theft. These by their very names, says Aristotle, “already imply badness”. Likewise, actions and passions like temperance and courage are good in themselves.

For Aristotle, to strike the virtuous mean yields “proper pride”, making it a good thing. In this context, Aristotle refers to something akin to humility. He argues that the excess of proper pride is empty vanity, while its deficiency is an undue sort of false humility. Aristotle views pride as “the crown of the virtues” because “it is hard to be truly proud”. Proper pride requires a commitment of character to seek all the virtues to their highest potential towards perfection. Without this pursuit, a person is less likely to be properly proud and is apt to be “disdainful and insolent”.

---

91 NE II.6, 1106a20, 24. See also, NE II.8, 1108b10ff, 27-28.
92 NE II.6, 1106a25, 24.
93 NE II.8, 1108a30, 27.
94 NE II.9, 1109a20ff, 29.
95 NE II.9, 1109a30, 29.
96 NE II.6, 1106b35, 25.
97 NE II.6, 1106b35, 25.
98 NE II.8, 1108a30, 27.
99 NE II.7, 1107a10, 25.
100 NE II.7, 1107a10, 25.
101 NE II.6, 1106b35, 25.
102 NE II.6, 1106b30, 24.
103 NE II.7, 1107a30, 26. For example, in the context of honour and dishonour, Aristotle asserts that a person might strive for an excess of honour and thus be called an “honor-lover” (or vain and full of self-conceit) or they may show that they are “indifferent to honor” which Aristotle characterises as a deficiency / defect, calling it “pusillanimity” or timidity / lack of courage (26). For Aristotle, a truly virtuous person cannot be indifferent to honour – this indifference to that which is good for a person seems to be a false sort of humility (see also, IV.3, 1125a25, 60).
104 NE IV.3, 1125a25, 60. Here, Aristotle mentions “magnanimity” that is associated with maintaining this proper sort of pride and he connects it to the virtuous person having “great honor” (60). The magnanimous person believes that they are worthy of great things and by exercising temperance they are able to assess their worthiness and escape either foolishness or vanity (NE IV.3, 1123b20ff, 57ff).
105 NE IV.3, 1124a5, 57.
106 NE IV.3, 1124a5, 57.
virtues help a person handle “gracefully” the good fortunes that come to them, which makes them properly proud. 107 The proud person “is not given to admiration” because they know themselves to be constantly learning in the context of the virtuous life. 108

Aristotle differentiates the ambitious person from the vain person. For Aristotle, a person is vain who falsely thinks they are worthy of great things despite lacking ambition. 109 Aristotle does not oppose human ambition, but rather a lack of self-awareness which leads a person to overestimate or underestimate themselves. In contrast to the proud person, the falsely humble person denies what is rightfully theirs which renders them useless to others. 110 Aristotle interprets these individuals as worse than “fools” because they back away from the good that is theirs. 111 Likewise, the vain person is “ignorant and foolish” because they make a public show of themselves and are later “found out” to be imposters. 112 Aristotle concludes that the falsely humble person is morally worse than the vain person. 113

Christian Humility in Pre-Modern Thought

For Augustine

By the fourth and fifth centuries, Augustine of Hippo had begun to link an understanding of humility with Christian theology and practice. He describes the moral virtue as that which raises a person “by a divine grace, above all earthly dignities that totter on this shifting scene.” 114 Augustine underscores humility’s importance for the moral life of Christians in a Letter (410) to a young disciple. Here, Augustine writes: "If you were to ask me, however often you might repeat the question, what are the instructions of the Christian religion, I would be disposed to answer always and only, ‘humility’ although, perchance, necessity might constrain me to speak also of other things”. 115 For Augustine, humility is fundamental to the virtuous Christian life from beginning to end, as opposed to the “pagan” virtues of the Greeks which denies or diminishes humility’s importance. 116 Humility comes to a person “through Christ, the perfect God-man”, who gives
humans “a happy life” or the Greek notion of eudaimonia. Augustine argues that pride, unlike Aristotle’s notion of proper pride, is a vice because it inhibits a person from looking up to God and coming to Christ for salvation. Scholars contend that Augustine’s thinking about the virtues shifted over time because he grew up in a pluralistic Roman culture where the “ideal man” was considered self-sufficient, properly prideful and independent. However, after Augustine’s conversion to Christianity, he rejects these ideals as “the essence of pride” which keeps a person trusting in themselves rather than in God.

Augustine argues in his autobiographical Confessions (397-400) that the humble person inherits the kingdom of God where Jesus Christ is the “foundation of humility”. On Augustine’s model, Christ becomes the predominant example of what it looks like to be a humble leader, surpassing Moses in Hebrew scripture. In the New Testament, Augustine highlights that Jesus “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” for which he is “highly exalted” with a “name above every name”. Jesus is “the true Mediator”, whose example inspires “the same humility” from his followers. For Augustine, Christ exemplifies “the way of humility” when he takes on human flesh through his incarnation and continues to look to God for guidance, never acting on his own accord, but always in union with the Father and the Spirit. Christ properly knows and understands himself in relation to God. On Augustine’s account, a

the history of Christian theology” (2012, 112). As “with humus, meaning ‘ground,’ it forms the basic demeanor (habitus) of the good Christian, paving the way for perfect charity, the highest virtue according to Augustine” (112). Humility is a biblical virtue beyond all doubt and “an important virtue in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament (112). See also, Jennifer L. Herdt, Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008). Herdt’s exploration of Augustine's Christian virtues and how he viewed, what he termed, ‘the pagan virtues’, continues to be debated in contemporary literature. Dunninson’s work on humility is drawn from Augustine’s perspective – and he enters these debates particularly in his piece, “Intellectual Humility and the Ends of the Virtues: Conflicting Aretaic Desiderata,” Political Theology, 18.2 (2017): 95-114.

118 Some argue that Augustine’s notion of human pride and Aristotle’s proper pride are not in great opposition. It is beyond the scope to enter these debates since my only aim is to establish the moral virtue of humility in the context of pre-modern Christianity (cf. De Klerk, 2017, 14).
120 De Klerk, 2017, 14.
121 Augustine, Confessions (CONF), trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1.18.30, 23, 7.18.24, 91 and 7.20.26, 93. References for the Confessions from here will be, Book, Chapter, Section, p#.
122 CONF 7.9.14, 87.
124 CONF 10.43.68, 153.
125 CONF 7.9.13, 86.
126 CONF 13.5.6, 194. It is beyond the scope to address issues and debates related to Augustine’s views of the Trinity. Refer to Augustine and the Trinity, Lewis Ayres (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See
person is like “the humble Jesus” when they choose to look up to God, understanding their dependence on him by lowering their pride.\textsuperscript{127} Christian humility is that inner disposition that replaces a person’s misguided “self-confidence” because of inherent sinfulness with a newfound willingness to “cast themselves” upon Christ who wants to lift them up.\textsuperscript{128} By contrast, Augustine declares that the epitome of human pride is when a person chooses to remain in spiritual “darkness”, turning away from God, and toiling on their own “amid the shadows".\textsuperscript{129} Augustine establishes the standard definition or tenor of Christian humility in pre-modern thought, concluding that the humble person who follows Christ becomes morally strong, “like the mountains of God”.\textsuperscript{130}

For the Early Monastics

In the translation of the \textit{Apophthegmata Patrum or The Desert Fathers}, Benedicta Ward explains how the monastic way of life found “Christian expression” in deserts like Syria, Palestine, and Arabia.\textsuperscript{131} During roughly the same time as Augustine in the fifth century, desert places like these became known as a “land of hermits and monks”.\textsuperscript{132} The lifestyles of these monks and nuns, also known as \textit{Abbas} and \textit{Ammas} (or Fathers and Mothers) attracted many followers who sought their advice and counsel about how to live out an authentic Christian faith.\textsuperscript{133} In this regard, these monks and nuns practised “simple”, extended times of prayer and fasting, public acts of confession, or the selling of their material possessions.\textsuperscript{134} Over time, these practices became extreme forms of asceticism. For example, they began living in caves, swamps, cemeteries, or on 12-meter (40 foot) poles.\textsuperscript{135} These practices carried an “all-or-nothing attitude” because these monks and nuns wanted to influence the world, display their inward conversions through outward actions, and “spread the

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{CONF} 11.1.1, 155.
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{CONF} 11.1.1, 155.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{CONF} 13.2.3, 193.
\textsuperscript{130} \textit{CONF} 13.2.3, 193.
\textsuperscript{132} Ward, 1975, xvii.
\textsuperscript{133} Ward, 1975, xvii.
\textsuperscript{134} Ward, 1975, xvii.
Christian faith”.\textsuperscript{136} For the Desert Fathers and Mothers, these activities were not a solitary event or an annual sacrament but a lifetime of unwavering commitment.\textsuperscript{137}

One of the most well-known and influential figures of this early monastic period was Anthony the Great (251-356) or Saint Anthony of the Desert, also called the “Father of Monks” and “the prototype” of this extreme monastic lifestyle.\textsuperscript{138} Anthony lived most of his life in seclusion, practising the strictest of diets, often fasting or eating very little food for long periods of time.\textsuperscript{139} For Anthony, Christian humility—the antithesis of pride—makes it possible for a person to escape the snares of the devil which, like temptations, continue until “the last breath”.\textsuperscript{140} Following Anthony’s example, many others began flocking to the wilderness to hide themselves away in isolation and to practise Anthony’s notion of a “supreme humility” which they believed led them to God.\textsuperscript{141} For these early monastics, progress in humility was equated with these extreme forms and practices.\textsuperscript{142}

The Desert Fathers and Mothers believed that Christian humility came into a person’s life through various types of humiliations.\textsuperscript{143} They welcomed such things as nakedness and insults, viewing these as humiliating rites of passage through which they entered into the way of humility which they conceived as the “crown of the monk”.\textsuperscript{144} In this regard, Abba Matoes characterised the humble person as self-abasing, self-effacing and “below everyone” to the extent that they were keenly aware of their faults and their lowly status in the world.\textsuperscript{145} On this account, the humble person resists the temptation to engage in arguments or debates with others, whether they are right or wrong.\textsuperscript{146} This abasing disposition is best practised through measured periods of silence whereby the monk is enabled to let go of their personal prestige.\textsuperscript{147}

For the early desert monastics, Christian humility expressed through forms of self-abasement, humiliation and silence helped to validate their conversion and the authenticity of their Christian faith and discipleship.\textsuperscript{148} Amma Syncletica (circa fourth century) contends, “just as one

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{136} Knox, 2016.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Knox, 2016.
\item \textsuperscript{138} Ward, 1975, xviii.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Ward, 1975, 6, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Ward, 1975, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{141} Ward, 1975, xxxv.
\item \textsuperscript{142} Ward, 1975, xxxv.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Ward, 1975, 114-115.
\item \textsuperscript{144} Ward, 1975, 247.
\item \textsuperscript{145} Ward, 1975, 145.
\item \textsuperscript{146} Ward, 1975, 145.
\item \textsuperscript{147} Ward, 1975, xvi.
\end{itemize}
cannot build a ship unless one has some nails, so it is impossible to be saved without humility.”

Eventually, communities of monks and nuns (or monasteries) developed and sought to follow the example of the Desert Fathers and Mothers by way of their extreme practices and thinking about Christian humility. To this end, the monasteries wrote rules or juridical guidelines for daily life that codified and expanded these practices and expressions of humility.

**For the Monastic Orders**

In the West, Benedict of Nursia (today, Norcia—c. 480-547) wrote a *Rule* outlining twelve steps of humility for his order. Benedict’s steps are to 1) Fear God, which means the humble person knows that God is watching and is aware of all their thoughts and actions at all times. 2) Reject self-will in favour of submission to God’s will. 3) Obey those in authority. 4) Remain quiet and patient during times of suffering. 5) Confess sin to the Lord and the Abbot, denouncing it and seeking God’s mercy. 6) Accept all afflictions with contentment – because the humble monk knows that they are unworthy. 7) Believe in one’s “inferiority” in relation to all others. 8) Be reluctant to do anything not instructed by the order. 9) Remain Silent unless questioned because “the talkative man will not be guided aright in the world.” 10) Be slow to express laughter because “The fool lifts up his voice in laughter.” 11) Use as few words as possible because “a wise man is known by the fewness of his words.” 12) Bow one’s bodily posture in all manners of monastic life—“that in the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the field or elsewhere, sitting, walking, or standing, his head be always bent, his eyes cast down, accounting himself at all times as one convicted of his sins”.

The Benedictine monk, Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) devised “seven levels of humility”. In *Of Human Morals*, Anselm views the levels of Christian humility as “mountains” to climb, beginning with a knowledge of self:

For if we will to compare ourselves with others, we ought to pay attention to those things in us that are, as it were, things in which we excel, and that are from us, not from God. For indeed one who praises himself above another person for goods in which we excel [but are] from God acts like one who glories in the clothes belonging to another in which he happens to be decked. Thus, we should not compare these, but rather the evils that we have in

---

149 Ward, 1975, 235.
150 Ward, 1975, xviii, 32-33.
153 *RSB*, 21-29.
ourselves from ourselves, to other people’s goods. If we were to do this, we would appear to ourselves to be inferior to everyone else.  

Note that by the time of Anselm, the humble person no longer becomes strong like the mountains of God, as Augustine had proclaimed in the fifth century, but rather, they must struggle up the mountain to become humble in the first place. For Anselm, the humble person sees themselves as “contemptible” in comparison to God or to others. Anselm underscores that Christian humility is the lowly disposition of a person who comprehends God’s mercy towards them despite the debt that they owe. Anselm concludes that the highest level of humility is for a person to “love” the contemptible treatment of God and the world because it is this humble person who receives “indulgence” or grace.  

Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) and the order of Cistercians adhered to Benedict’s Rule. However, Bernard added a stringent “twelve degrees of humility”, which expanded upon Benedict’s twelve steps. For Bernard, the humble person attains truth only after they pass through the twelve degrees. Bernard’s understanding of humility mandates a “permanent” posture of bodily and spiritual prostration, a public “declaration” of inferiority, a “reticence” to give opinions or to press “personal desires” and a “constant abstinence from sin for fear of God”. Bernard gives detailed instructions for the order’s daily practice of these twelve degrees.  

The degrees of humility upward are coupled with twelve degrees of pride, downward. On Bernard’s model, “curiosity” is prideful as it draws a monk downward into matters that do not concern them. Bernard argues that a curious monk is a trouble-maker. For Bernard, a prideful person is conceited when they show “unseasonable joy or sadness” and excessive laughter or talking. Self-assertion is also pride because it assumes a person knows their readiness to take on a  

155 HM, 81.  
156 HM, 81.  
157 HM, 81.  
159 DSB, 5.  
160 DSB, 5.  
161 DSB, 2ff and 4-23.  
162 DSB, 24ff.  
163 DSB, 11ff.  
164 DSB, 24.  
165 DSB, 30ff.
task. The final degree downward on Bernard’s account of pride is “habitual sin”, which is the antithesis of humility’s first degree to fear God.

For the Mendicants

By the thirteenth century, a new type of religious order emerged which was comprised of “mendicants” (or beggars), also called friars. The Franciscans and the Dominicans expressed humility through an ideal of poverty that was patterned after the lifestyle of the incarnated Christ as depicted in the gospels. Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226), the son of a merchant in central Italy started his order when he and twelve followers stood before Pope Innocent III in 1209. Previously, Francis had heard a priest reading Matthew’s gospel where Jesus tells his followers to sell their possessions and give the money to the poor. Jesus’s disciples were commanded to take nothing with them and to rely on God and others for their daily needs. Francis heard Jesus’s instructions and obeyed them literally. Francis left his family’s mercantile business and let go of his inheritance. His humble decision to follow Christ through poverty made an impression and soon others followed him. The Franciscan way of humility through poverty as it was practiced and lived before the world had a unique and refreshing effect on the church of its day that previous monastic orders had been unable to conjure. The Franciscan order crossed into countries like Germany and France and brought much needed reform to the church of its day through effective ministries of pastoral care and culturally-relevant preaching.

The Dominicans’ founder, Dominic De Guzman (1170-1221) was commissioned by the papacy to combat heretical groups in the south of France especially the Cathars, who had been drawing the faithful away from the church. Dominic and others in his company (after a period of trial and error) decided to dress in tattered clothing like some of the sects were doing. This strategy drew people’s attention who had become disillusioned by the church because of its affluence and corruption. The Dominicans took a vow of poverty (like the Franciscans), owning nothing and

166 DSB, 34.
167 DSB, 37ff.
169 Brooke, 1975, 22.
170 Brooke, 1975, 22.
172 Brooke, 1975, 21-22.
174 Brooke, 1975, 22. These sorts of practices were common for the time period, which I discuss in greater detail in chapters five and seven.
175 Brooke, 1975, 96, 107, 111.
176 Brooke, 1975, 71. I discuss the Cathars and other religious movements of the time in greater detail in chapter five. Brooke also includes a useful account of Dominic and his order’s beginnings, 89ff.
177 Brooke, 1975, 95.
relying on donations for support. They filled a void for the church at the time by providing preachers who were well-trained scholars in theology and philosophy.¹⁷⁸

For Aquinas

The Dominican friar, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), critiqued concepts and practices of Christian humility in parts of his Summa Theologica (c. 1270). Thomas’s Summa, which is well-known and accessible in English, was described by Pope Pius X (1835-1914) as the course of philosophical study that alone could restore theology to its once “pristine glory”.¹⁷⁹ Many of the writings and summae of the Scholastic period (spanning the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries) include sections on Christian humility, which indicates the continuing importance of the moral virtue throughout the Middle Ages. Thomas begins his exploration of Christian humility by questioning the validity and usefulness of the various steps, levels and degrees of humility that had been delineated in the rules of earlier monastics.¹⁸⁰ In this way, he helps to provide an exemplary internal critique of humility which, as I show, does not stray from foundational theological moorings but rather questions, for example, some of the self-abasing practices that have coincided with humility for centuries. To accomplish this, Thomas begins by asserting that it is unlikely that one virtue or moral good opposes another virtue such as in the case of humility and Aristotle’s notion of proper human pride, which is “the crown of all virtues”.¹⁸¹ From this premise, Thomas is then able to addresses notions such as curiosity, studiousness and the practice of silence and how these either detract from or indicate true Christian humility.

Thomas agrees that misdirected curiosity is capable of leading a person towards knowledge that is evil, sinful or senseless.¹⁸² He argues, however, that curiosity also leads to good and “praiseworthy” actions when the humble person watches, learns and then emulates the good of others.¹⁸³ For this reason, Thomas denotes an indirect relationship between the disposition of humility and studiousness because humility in a person helps them to remove “obstacles” that

¹⁷⁸ Brooke, 1975, 97, 99. Brooke writes that Francis “constantly reiterated that example was a more powerful argument than precept ... or cleverness” (99). While Dominic respected Francis in this regard, Dominic “wished his friars to be trained theologians” (99, italics added). The issue of training and theological education became the source of controversy for the Franciscans which I discuss in chapter seven as it relates to Francis and his humility.
¹⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (ST), trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981). Citations and references go as follows, Part (I, II, III, etc.), Question (q.161, q.162, etc.) and Article(s) (a.1 or arts.1-2).
¹⁸¹ ST II, q.161, a.3
¹⁸² ST II, q.161, a.2.4.
¹⁸³ ST II, q.161, a.3.2.
typically hinder them from studying and learning. In the context of his discussion of prudence, Thomas contends that the practice of silence is perhaps a good indication of a person’s humility. However, Thomas’s notion of silence is not to be understood as the humble person withholding their speech or keeping their thoughts to themselves. Rather, Thomas’s moral silence in relation to the humble person involves an “unbiased perception” of the world through “the art of receiving counsel” and the alertness that is required to remain “composed” and ready “for the unexpected” choices and difficulties of life.

Thomas’s examination of Christian humility addresses the past theory that pride accompanies laughter or mirth. Thomas writes that “excesses” of mirth might be senseless frivolity, leading to sin. However, he contends that laughter and “games” are a necessary part of human interaction, which means that “a lack of mirth” might be considered sinful. Thomas also asserts that a monk’s attire is incapable of revealing virtue since it is by “words and deeds” that a person is known for their virtue. Thomas argues that prudence does not “achieve the good by slavishly and literally following certain prescriptions which have been blindly and arbitrarily set forth”. In this regard, Thomas cautions against the practices of “self-abasement” because they might indicate “false humility” which rules them as “grievous pride”. Thomas sees the need for a person to practise submission in the moral life but safeguards it against submitting to the wrong people. He aligns with Aristotle’s concept of the “mean” by arguing that the prudent person uses all their unique capabilities and the resources available to them (within their context) to act neither less than who they are in false humility, nor more than their human condition allows by way of “hubris”.

Thus, Thomas invokes prudence to discern the proper and “legal” circumstances for any and all outward acts of submission. In this way, Thomas thought that “by grace” a person is capable of taking “counsel for themselves”, distinguishing what was “good from evil counsel” and, in the end,

---

184 ST II, q.161, a.5.2.2
185 Pieper, 1996, 22.
186 Pieper, 1996, 22.
188 Cf. DSB, 30ff.
189 ST II, q.161, a.6.5.
190 ST II, q.161, a.6.5.
193 ST II, q.161, a.1.2.2.
194 ST II, q.161, a.1.2.2.
196 ST II, q.161, a.1.3.5.
“bearing things well” and living the life that they were given.\textsuperscript{197} For these reasons, Thomas offers a needed internal critique of Christian humility that counteracted some of the self-abasing practices that were popular in his day. However, to do so, he does not jettison the notions of grace or dependence on God, but rather distinguishes true humility from false humility.

Lastly, Thomas continues his critique of past notions of steps, levels and degrees of humility on the basis that they are “unfittingly placed” and cannot determine the “inward actions” of a person.\textsuperscript{198} Thomas replaces excessive levels and steps of humility, asserting that:

Man arrives at humility in two ways. First and chiefly by a gift of grace, and in this way the inner man precedes the outward man. The other way is by human effort, whereby he first of all restrains the outward man, and afterwards succeeds in plucking out the inward root. It is according to this order that the degrees of humility are here enumerated.\textsuperscript{199}

In this way, Thomas characterises the humble person as, first and foremost, prudent as they seek, by God’s gift of grace, the good that is available to them in the world for their human flourishing.\textsuperscript{200} This good comes to those who remain open, curious, unbiased and studious which begins and ends with a spirit of learning and the understanding that the world is constantly changing. On Thomas’s account, the virtuous person follows a plan that they “do not understand as a whole, nor in all of its parts” but a plan that is revealed to them “moment to moment” as they are in a state of “being-on-the-way.”\textsuperscript{201}

\textbf{For Ignatius & the Jesuits}

I conclude this analysis of humility in pre-modernity by describing it from the perspective of the Jesuits. At the start of the modern era, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) with his companions, founded the Society of Jesus or the Jesuits (1540). In the \textit{Spiritual Exercises}, Ignatius describes humility in terms of descending levels or manners.\textsuperscript{202} The first manner is paramount for “eternal salvation” and calls for a person to “lower” themselves as much as possible. This humble person seeks “to obey the law of God in everything” which keeps them from “mortal sin”.\textsuperscript{203} The second manner of humility “is more perfect ... than the first” and views the humble person as having “no inclination” to riches or honour, preferring death over unpardonable sin.\textsuperscript{204} The third manner “is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{197} Pieper, 1996, 14. See also, Schumacher, 2015, 165.
\item \textsuperscript{198} \textit{ST} II, q.161, a.6.1.
\item \textsuperscript{199} \textit{ST} II, q.161, a.6.2.2.
\item \textsuperscript{200} Pieper (1996) would support this claim, 22ff.
\item \textsuperscript{201} Pieper, 1996, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{202} Ignatius of Loyola, \textit{The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola} (SE), trans. Father Elder Mulan, SJ. (New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1914), 1-89.
\item \textsuperscript{203} SE, 37.
\item \textsuperscript{204} SE, 37.
\end{itemize}
most perfect” in that the humble person imitates Christ by choosing poverty, shame and abuse in hopes of becoming a worthless fool rather than “wise or prudent in this world”.

Summary & Conclusion

In this first chapter, I have sought to trace the development in thought and practice of the moral virtue of humility at key moments in pre-modernity. Starting with the Hebrews of the Ancient Near East, I explained how humility was considered the chief virtue, central to all good moral interaction. I presented human examples of humility from the Hebrew scriptures, namely Moses and King Josiah who looked to and feared God as the supreme ruler of the world who guides those who seek him. Then, from the rabbinic tradition found in the Talmud, I elucidated the Hebrew understanding of humility in the context of wisdom and learning, in contrast to pride, which refuses to acknowledge God’s rulership and the help of others. Then, I turned to the Greeks, such as Plato and Aristotle to present their well-known concept of the virtues as the best way for a person to achieve the moral good life. Although the Greeks say little about humility, I showed how Aristotle depicts it in the context of what it means for a person to have proper human pride. On this account, false humility is a deficiency of proper pride (or self-contempt) and vanity is an excess of pride (or self-conceit).

Augustine, much like the Hebrews, viewed humility as foundational to the virtuous life. However, for Augustine, Christ supersedes all former examples of humility because he led in “the way of humility” by dying on the cross for our salvation. Augustine Christianises humility. He distinguishes the Greek notion of proper human pride and the sort of pride that rejects God and refuses to look up to Christ for salvation. For Augustine, Christian humility is the mark of true discipleship that renders a person strong, like the “mountains of God”. I demonstrated how the early monastics began practising Christian humility in extreme ways, such as isolation in caves, prolonged fasts, and humiliating and self-abasing behaviours. These popular Desert Fathers and Mothers were revered in their day for these expressions of Christian humility. The monastic orders that followed wrote these self-abasing forms of humility into their rules of daily life and practice, codifying them into rigorous descending steps, degrees and levels to be mastered.

Next, I showed that these outward behaviours and ways of thinking about Christian humility were later questioned, or rather critiqued by Thomas Aquinas in his Summa. Thomas did not diminish Christian humility’s importance as a virtue or as a way to show deep dependence on God. On the contrary, Thomas reasoned that Christian humility requires an inward work of God’s grace

---

205 SE, 37.
206 CONF 7.9.13, 86.
that finds outward expression in a myriad of ways depending on a person’s context and life circumstances. In this regard, Thomas argued against delineating and pinpointing certain practices and behaviours as the proper or only expression of Christian humility. On Thomas’s account, the idea that studiousness, curiosity or laughter categorically denotes pride in a person, is false. Likewise, to think that Christian humility is represented in all expressions of silence, submission to others and tattered clothing is equally false.

In chapter two, I continue this exploration of humility by shifting to examine how Christian humility came to be perceived externally, for example, by the world during the eighteenth the nineteenth centuries. At this time, influential moral philosophers began questioning whether Christian humility should be rejected because of its self-abasing expressions and practices which made it seem more like a vice than a virtue. These scholars critiqued Christian humility, labelling it outdated and inimical to modern society – an impediment to human flourishing in the new world. Modern objections such as these continue to influence the literature on Christian humility today, which I discuss in chapter three.
Chapter 2: Critiques of Christian Humility in Modern Thought

This chapter focuses on the arguments of three modern philosophers whose critiques of Christian humility continue to influence research on moral virtue today.²⁰⁷ I begin with Scottish Philosopher, David Hume (1711-1776), specifically portions of the Treatise of Human Nature (1739) and the Enquiries: Concerning Human Understanding and The Principles of Morals (1748 / 1751).²⁰⁸ In the Treatise, Hume gives attention to the concepts of pride and humility, describing at length how they are either virtuous or vicious. In the Enquiries, he makes a definitive statement against Christian humility’s necessity and usefulness for the modern world.²⁰⁹ Second, Prussian-German moral philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) rejects any notion of self-contempt and then re-defines humility as he understands it in the context of human dignity in his Lectures on Ethics (1764 & 1784).²¹⁰ Lastly, German philosopher and well-known cultural critic, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) delivers a harsh critique against Christian humility’s value and necessity throughout several of his writings. Nietzsche considers humility and the Christian religion itself as objectionable to modern moral life in his early work, The Gay Science (1882), then later in his Beyond Good and Evil (1886), and lastly, in On the Genealogy of Morals (1887).²¹¹ By examining selections from the writings of these three philosophers, I hope to clarify the sorts of external modern critiques against Christian humility.

Hume’s Assessment of the Passions

In Hume’s view, the only way for a person to gain awareness about what is morally good or evil is by experiencing “the pleasure of approval” or the uneasiness that comes with disapproval in relation to a trait or characteristic of a person.²¹² Hume’s moral theory includes the notion of “the passions” which are, in essence, human emotions, desires and feelings.²¹³ Hume divides the passions

²¹³ Cohon, 2008, 12, 15.
into “direct” and “indirect” categories. By the former, he means those passions which arise purely from good or evil or pain or pleasure. By the latter (indirect) passions, Hume means that these are dependent on the direct passions. Hume includes on his list of indirect passions, “pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, envy, pity, malice, and generosity”. The direct passions include, “desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair, and security”. There is ongoing debate concerning how the direct and indirect passions work and interrelate on Hume’s model. In this section, I explore the methods Hume uses to assess the moral quality of pride and humility - as either virtuous or vicious.

In the Treatise, Hume asserts that the indirect passions of pride and humility are “commonly used words”, needing no real introductory explanation or definition since the experiences and subsequent ideas that they convey or conjure are known to all humans. Hume dispenses with “preliminaries” and begins explaining how he judges pride and humility related to their virtuous and / or vicious qualities for the person who wishes to live a moral life. At the outset of his analysis, a few key concepts are important to Hume in relation to his moral theory. First, “pride and humility, though directly contrary, have yet the same object” which is “the self”. He contrasts this with the notion that love and hatred, similarly, are opposing passions with the same object – that being “others”. Hume then delineates which sorts of “natural” and universal things cause pride or humility in the self – i.e., the abundance of (and conversely) the lack of property, beauty, riches, personal merit in accomplishments and intellect, having children or a family and so on.

Accomplishments and possessions such as these, argues Hume, naturally cause all humans to experience certain feelings and emotions. Significant to Hume’s methodology is the concept that these natural, human emotions are indicators of whether any passion is labelled virtuous or vicious for a person who wishes to live a modern moral life. For Hume, “unpleasure and pleasure are the primary causes of vice and virtue, which implies that they must also be the causes of all the

---

214 Cohon, 2008, 31ff.
215 T II.1.2, 148.
216 T II.1.1, 148
217 T II.1.1, 148.
218 T II.1.1, 148.
219 See Jane McIntyre, “Hume’s Passions: Direct and Indirect,” Hume Studies 26.1 (April 2000): 77-86. McIntyre provides an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the direct and indirect passions on Hume’s model to then apply it to Hume’s virtue of ‘strength of mind’ (77).
220 T II.1.2, 148.
221 T II.1.2, 148.
222 T II.1.2, 148.
223 T II.2.1, 175.
224 T II.1.7, 161.
225 Cf. T II.1.7-8, 161ff.
226 Cf. T II.1.7-8, 161ff.
effects of vice and virtue, including the pride and humility that inevitably accompany vice and virtue.”

On Hume’s model, a passion like pride is considered a moral virtue because a person’s family, riches, or beauty, for example, most certainly bring pleasurable sentiments and feelings to them – to the self. By contrast, Hume argues that the indirect passion of humility engenders qualities that make a person feel pain or “unpleasure” which categorically rules it a vice. For Hume, Christian humility, as he conceives it, does not “excite the soul” but rather pains it or gives off an unpleasant, uneasy sensation whereas pride does not.

Thus, the emotion alone associated with either of these passions, writes Hume, “convinces us” that pride is virtuous while humility, vicious. To this, Hume concedes that for those “accustomed to the style of the schools and pulpit, and having never considered human nature in any other light, ... may here be surprised to hear ... of virtue as exciting pride, which they look upon as a vice and of vice producing humility, which they have been taught to consider as a virtue.” Hume gives a great deal of attention to describing both pride and humility conceived in these ways, concluding that “the most rigid morality allows us to get pleasure from reflecting on a generous action that we have performed; and no morality judges it to be a virtue to feel any useless remorse when we think about our past villainy and baseness.” However, Hume safeguards this stark interpretation, writing that humility is not “always vicious” nor is pride “always virtuous”.

Later in the Enquiries, Hume asserts a marked difference between the sort of “noble pride and spirit” whereby a person naturally and rightly feels “a well-founded self-value” regarding their “own merits and accomplishments” versus having no esteem for them or being ignorant of them.

In these later writings, Hume is less stringent in his thinking about the passions overall, arguing that all humans should be wary of “the vanity of self-conceit” and seek to maintain an agreeable and favourable “bias towards modesty”, which together “forms a shining character”. However, Hume’s mentioning of “modesty” is not his way of reimagining Christian humility nor does he let go of his belief that Christian humility is generally and most often emotionally unpleasant, and therefore a vice to be avoided.

---

227 T II.1.7, 160.
228 T II.1.5, 154.
229 T II.1.7, 161.
230 T II.1.7, 161.
231 T II.1.7, 161.
233 EM VIII, 265 (italics added).
Hume’s Critique of Christian Humility

While the Treatise leaves the status of Christian humility somewhat in doubt, Hume’s later writings definitively reject it. He argues in the Enquiries that “everywhere men of sense” must disavow, through unprejudiced reason and “without the delusive glosses of superstition and false religion ... the whole train of monkish virtues ... celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, [and] solitude.” On what grounds should sensible humans reject these so-called “monkish virtues”? Hume asserts, “because they serve no manner of purpose; neither advance a man’s fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment.” For Hume, humility and all such traits “stupefy” proper reason, “harden the heart” and “sour” the personality of a person. For these reasons, Hume argues to “transfer [monkish virtues like Christian humility] to the opposite column and place them in the catalogue of vices”. Hume’s coup de grâce against Christian humility is to label people with traits and dispositions like celibacy, penance, and humility as “delirious and dismal” and unsuitable company for the living, only fitted for the dead. In summary, Hume views Christian humility as a vicious moral quality, which is outdated and contrary to human flourishing. In the next section, I explore Immanuel Kant’s perception of Christian humility. As with Hume, it is not my intention to delve into all the intricacies of Kant’s moral theory, but rather to examine his thoughts on Christian humility.

Kant’s Self-Regarding Duties

Kant’s moral theory is considered deontological since he interprets a moral person as one who seeks to do their duty as it is impressed upon them by an ideal Moral Law, regardless of the outcome. However, on Kant’s account, the moral person’s first duty is to themselves. These

235 EM IX, 271.
236 EM IX, 269.
237 EM IX, 270.
238 EM IX, 270.
239 It is worth noting that Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), who I highlight in greater detail in chapter three, around the same time as Hume, wrote a treatise on the rights of women drawing similar conclusions to his regarding the problems of Christian humility.
241 C 27:341, 122 (Notes by Collins) in Heath and Schneewind, 1997. References from here will be, Section#, Sub-section#, p#.
self-regarding duties are preeminent for a moral life because without these it is impossible for a person to carry out the moral duties that are required of them towards others in the world.\textsuperscript{242} In this regard, in the Lecture, “Of Duties to Oneself”, Kant identifies \textit{selbstschätzung} or self-esteem as “the \textit{principium} (beginning) of the self-regarding duties” for all humans.\textsuperscript{243} For Kant, self-esteem means that a person views their “moral worth” from the foundational perspective that they are a human as opposed to only seeing their worth in relation to their “skill” and performance.\textsuperscript{244} On Kant’s model, “a human being ‘regarded as a person’ – that is, as an agent capable of giving [themselves] the moral law – possesses an absolute worth and dignity which allows [them] to demand respect from other rational creatures, but also obligates [them] to treat [their] own person with respect.”\textsuperscript{245} Thus, “inner worth” prevails and rests securely on the basis that a person is part of this free and dignified humanity – “even if all the [other] amenities of life are sacrificed” or lost.\textsuperscript{246} One caveat Kant admits is that a person might act in some way that renders them disappointed with themselves, causing them to think of themselves with “a low opinion.”\textsuperscript{247}

However, in this regard, Kant argues that a person must never have a low opinion of their \textit{humanity} regardless of their failings and moral mistakes.\textsuperscript{248} For Kant, all of humanity carries as intrinsic to it, “a high opinion” which he equates with “noble pride” or the proper pride that humans should have towards themselves at all times.\textsuperscript{249} Thus, self-esteem means that a rational person fulfills the first moral duty to themselves by taking pride in the dignity of their humanity.\textsuperscript{250} In this same

---

\textsuperscript{242} C 27:341, 122. It is beyond the scope to look further at Kant’s moral idealism (and the debates and controversies it sparked), which was expanded “by Reinhold, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and that movement gave rise to British Idealism and the work of Green, Bradley, and Bosanquet. G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell [who] took their refusal of idealism as the starting point for analytic philosophy” (2). Cf. Matthew C. Altman, \textit{The Palgrave Kant Handbook} (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018). I am only concerned with Kant’s view of the moral virtue of humility, which is also controversial since some scholars, like Louden, wonder if there is any place for humanity in Kant’s moral theory. See Robert B. Louden, “Kantian Moral Humility: Between Aristotle and Paul,” \textit{Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 75.3} (Nov. 2007): 632-639. In the end, Louden concludes that “Kant wants to claim a middle space somewhere between pagan self-assertion and Christian self-denial; a space that is created by bringing together the truths of each tradition” (633). However, Louden provides a critique to both Greenberg’s and Langton’s benchmark works. Cf. Jeanine Grenberg (2005) and Rae Langton, \textit{Kantian Humility: Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

\textsuperscript{243} C 27:344, 125 and 27:347, 127.

\textsuperscript{244} C 27:344, 125.


\textsuperscript{246} C 27:344, 125.

\textsuperscript{247} C 27:349, 129.

\textsuperscript{248} C 27:349, 129.

\textsuperscript{249} C 27:349, 129.

\textsuperscript{250} C 27:349, 129.
Lecture series, “Of Proper Self-Esteem”, Kant mentions humility (much like in Aristotle’s writings) by way of a reference to timidity or “false humility”, which Kant defines as “servility”.\(^{251}\) labelling it (like Hume did) “a monk’s virtue ... [and] completely unnatural”.\(^{252}\) However, Kant does identify a type of moral humility which he deems to be less false and perhaps aligned with his concepts of the natural and rational human person. On this basis, Kant redefines Christian humility in such a way as to make it fit with his moral theory, which I examine in the next section.

Kant’s Honest Humility

For the sake of transparency, I should note that Kant rarely mentions humility in his writings or lectures which seems like, as Louden put it, “a nonstarter”.\(^{253}\) However, while Kant does describe humility as “a monk’s virtue”, he does not reject Christian humility outright but instead attempts to integrate some form of it (or parts of it) into his moral philosophy.\(^{254}\) At the start, Kant calls a Christian humility of self-abasement, “useless”.\(^{255}\) Kant objects to self-abasement (or self-denial) which he labels as “the opposite of self-esteem”, claiming that humility should presuppose “a correct estimation of self”, keeping a person “in bounds” against either self-denial or self-conceit.\(^{256}\) Kant resists notions of Christian humility that call a person to self-denial and abasement but he also worries about natural human self-conceit which is possible in the absence of a virtue like humility.\(^{257}\) To solve this dilemma, Kant seeks to redefine humility.\(^{258}\)

Kant’s understanding of the virtues sets “the love of the truth” as the highest aim, “the first law” and the foundation for the moral life.\(^{259}\) By Kant’s way of thinking, virtue is best exemplified by a “strength in mastering and overcoming oneself”, which requires a certain degree of “self-coercion

\(^{251}\) Servility means subjugation, human subversion, etc. The OED defines it as excessive deference, slavishness, and self-abasement.
\(^{252}\) C 27:349, 129.
\(^{253}\) Louden, 2007, 632.
\(^{254}\) In notes by Herder (H) 27:49, C 27:349 and C 27:379, in Heath and Schneewind, 1997, 16. Note that in his Lectures on Practical Philosophy, Kant seems to recant his belief about humility as monkish saying, “we have more reason to observe imperfections [in ourselves] than perfections, since they are more numerous, and the contemplation of perfections can very easily do harm. Humility is therefore not a monkish virtue, as Hume believes, but already needful even in natural morality” (H 27:39 italics added). Kant later qualifies what he meant, sidings with Hume regarding Christian humility as it had come to be understood in the modern era.
\(^{255}\) H 27:40, 17.
\(^{256}\) H 27:39-41, 16-17. Here, Kant seems to align with Aristotle’s concept of “the mean”.
\(^{258}\) H 27:40, 17. Also, Louden asserts that it is at the intersection of self-conceit and humility that Kant parts ways with Christianity by suggesting a better way to go about striking down self-conceit that resists altogether the binary of conceit versus abasement (637).
\(^{259}\) H 27:60, 26.
On Kant’s model, the virtue of “humility is ... honest self-esteem that is sharply distinguished from self-abasement, which merely inspires contempt”. Kant’s conception of humility, framed in terms of “honest self-esteem”, loves the truth and strikes down self-conceit, not by announcing human imperfections in some form of self-denial or abasement but rather through the means of human courage, “self-command” and inner moral strength. Thus, when a person compares themselves to the natural (universal) Moral Law (and not to other humans), they experience a Kantian sort of morally honest humility.

In other words, when a rational human being makes a “sincere and exact comparison” of themselves to the Moral Law with all its inherent duties, that person is “unavoidably” struck with “true humility” because they have glimpsed the truth about themselves - rendering the morally humble person incapable of self-conceit while simultaneously inspiring and pushing them to have courage and inner strength in the face of their inconsistencies. However, Kant’s concept of humility does not infer that the humble person, when faced with their inner contradictions and inadequacies in relation to the standard of the Moral Law, disparages their human dignity as Kant believed Christian humility forced a person to do. Kant considers this sort of low opinion to be immoral because the first duty of the Moral Law is the duty of self-regard, and self-regard means having a proper pride in oneself as a human. For this reason, the humble person is “in awe” of the Moral Law and in awe of their inner ability “to give the law” to themselves while remaining acutely aware of their human limitations – all with the goal to carry out the duties which are inherent to living the moral good life.

**Nietzsche’s Critique of Christianity**

Nietzsche considered himself to be an atheist and is perhaps best known for his statement, Gott ist tot or “God is dead” written in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* or *The Gay Science*

---

260 C 27:300, 91.
261 H 27:40, 17 (italics added).
262 C 27:342, 123, C 27:368, 143, C 27:380, 152. Kant talks of moral strength and courage throughout his lectures. For example, “he who in misfortune still shows a cheerful and steadfast spirit, who maintains a firm courage, even when he has lost everything, still has that within him which possesses an intrinsic worth, and such a person deserves compassion instead” (C 27:368, 143, italics added).
266 C 27:349, 128.
The Gay Science was originally a four-part Book which Nietzsche himself labelled as his “most personal” writing. The legendary phrase, “God is dead” appears first in section 108 of The Gay Science, “in association with the image of the Buddha’s shadow, still to be seen in a cave centuries after his death”. However, the more well-known passage (in section 125) begins with a madman yelling “God is dead!” while carrying a lantern in the “bright morning”. Then, “God is dead” is repeated in a fifth Book (section 343), which Nietzsche wrote as part of a second edition of The Gay Science, published five years after the original four-book project. In section 343, Nietzsche describes the evaporation (or the “waning” and “dying”) of the “traditional illusions” of the Christian religion.

For Nietzsche, the life and writings of revered theologians such as Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) demonstrated that Christianity had a “gruesome appearance”, including a “suicide of reason”, which celebrated the sacrifice of “freedom, pride, of all self-confidence of the spirit”, leading its followers to a life of “enslavement, self-derision, and self-mutilation”. As Nietzsche interpreted it, the ancient Christian religion that had come to the modern world was no longer tolerable, including notions such as, “god on the cross”, subjugated spirits, self-cruelty and the “badly spoiled conscience”.

These, Nietzsche argues, are to be excised by the “infuriating” age of modernity. In the vitriolic three essays On the Genealogy of Morals, Nietzsche spells out his repudiation of Christianity by defining its despicable “bulwark” as the lingering effect of humanity’s “bad conscience”. Nietzsche asserts that because of the Christian religion, humans in the West only know “punishments” and the obstruction of their “natural instincts”. To Nietzsche’s way of thinking, the horrific way that the Christian religion characterises “God sacrificing himself for man’s debt” or “God paying himself back” ultimately leaves the human person irreconcilably in “debt towards God” which then “becomes an instrument of torture” — “a bad conscience.”

---

270 Bernard Williams writes that “Gaya scienza (‘joyful, cheerful, or gay science’) was a term used by the troubadours in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries to refer to the art of poetry. ... Nietzsche writes that he has used the term gaya scienza here to designate the specific unity of ‘singer, knight, and free spirit’ which was characteristic of early Provençal culture” (2001, 1). References from here will be, Book#, Section#, Page#.
271 Williams, 2001, xii.
272 Williams, 2001, xii.
273 BGE III.46, 44. References from here will be: Part#, Section#, Page#.
274 BGE III.46, 44.
275 BGE III.46, 44.
276 GM II.16, 56.
277 GM II.16, 56.
278 GM II.22, 63.
words, this “debt / guilt” before God, says Nietzsche, is “reinterpreted ... as animosity, insurrection, rebellion against the ‘master’, the ‘father’, the primeval ancestor and beginning of the world”.  

Thus, humans are slavishly pitched into some cosmic scuffle between God and the Devil, which requires that humans emit an unequivocal ‘no’ to themselves, to their natures, their “naturalness” and the “reality” of their being while giving an undiscriminating ‘yes’ to a holy, judgmental God and master – the so-called “Hangman”.  

On Nietzsche’s account, Christianity was excruciatingly sad, “black and gloomy” and utterly unnerving to the human soul. The religion’s sickness is “woven together with the concept of God ... our creditor” and the despairing “impossibility of paying back the debt” that we owe him, leaving humans in perpetual penance and slavery, “burdened with a curse”, feeling “inherently worthless”. For Nietzsche, Christianity’s best answer for paying back the impossible debt of guilt is through the horror of human sacrifice or martyrdom. The gloom and guilt of a bad conscience crush humanity’s “instinct of freedom” or the inherent “will to power” forcing this power and freedom to go “latent”, hopelessly awaiting a deserved and violent death – ostensibly giving humans “a will to nothingness”. Without power and freedom, humans under the yoke of Christianity, turn on themselves in “secret self-violation”, cruelty, seeing themselves as exasperating and “difficult” to God, causing an internal split which pushes humans to make themselves “suffer out of the pleasure” of suffering.  

For Nietzsche, Christianity inhibited the flourishing of its practitioners, asking them to question their own dignity and beauty because of its cruel vision of “selflessness, self-denial, and self-sacrifice”. In this regard, humans were pushed to attach ultimate “moral value” to such “sickness” and slavery. In his critique of the guilt-shaped Christian religion, Nietzsche argues for

---

279 GM II.22, 63-64.  
280 GM II.22, 64.  
281 GM II.22, 64.  
282 GM II.21, 63 (italics added).  
283 GM II.21, 63.  
285 GM II.18, 59.  
286 GM II.18, 60.  
287 GM II.18, 60.
the dawning of a new project for humanity, envisioning a new world order, shouting, “Enough!”

Nietzsche’s new world includes the descent (and death) of a ‘holo God’ which excludes all the lunacy ignited by Christianity’s bad conscience – with its “self-abuse” and “man’s self-crucifixion.”

Nietzsche saw the possibility in modernity of making better use “of the invention of gods” wherein humanity’s “rage against itself” is replaced with an enjoyment of the soul’s freedom and will to create and achieve success which, for Nietzsche was the opposite of Christendom’s failed system.

Nietzsche ends the “Essays” prophesying and hoping not only for a new age of instinctual freedom and power for all humans, but also for a “redeeming man” (a younger man) who would come and lead the way through the “mouldy, self-doubting present day” with “great love and contempt” as he forges new pathways against the present ideals, curses and “the will to nothingness.” This man, Nietzsche names “Zarathustra, the Godless …” Zarathustra acts as Nietzsche’s mouthpiece, decrying Nietzsche’s disgust and disdain of the Christian religion’s asceticism, including its ideals and followers who, out of sickness and slavery from a bad conscience, choose to live in front of the world their destructive self-denial and contempt for life.

Moving from his views on Christianity, I turn now to Nietzsche’s critique of Christian humility which flows from his overall disgust of the Christian religion as I have presented it.

**Nietzsche’s Critique of Christian Humility**

Before pointing to some of the graphic ways that Nietzsche critiques Christian humility, I explain Nietzsche’s metaphorical and story-like way of envisioning how “sickly” ideals, like humility and Christian virtue, are formed in the human psyche in the first place. Nietzsche says that somehow in the dark workshop of ideals, weakness was rendered as “an accomplishment” and from there, humility’s associations spiralled downward “with no doubt about it.” Nietzsche’s portrayal of humility’s downward, false and dark ideal includes “impotence” that refuses to retaliate, “timid baseness” and “submission to people one hates.” As though Nietzsche was surprised, he claims

---

289 *GM II*.23, 64.
290 *GM II*.23, 64.
293 *OED* defines asceticism as “a gloomy abstinence associated with the Christian religion …”.
294 *GM III*.9, 81. In passages like this, Nietzsche mocks the ascetics (or Christian monastics) with their high “spirituality” which he posits seems immune to philosophical analysis or critique.
295 *GM III*.3, 70.
296 *GM I*.14, 27 (italics added).
297 *GM I*.14, 27.
that these qualities have been “turned into goodness” or required of us as “obedience” by none other than, “God”. 298 Then, Nietzsche develops his distrust of this broader and impotent “ascetic ideal”, portraying it together with “three great catchwords ... poverty, humility and chastity.” 299 For Nietzsche, the ascetics (or monastics) with their passed down, fabricated and sugary ideals only exist as “an excuse to hibernate” and as a “form of madness” 300 The ascetics, writes Nietzsche are “deified creatures” who have left the nest, better suited to fly above than to rest below. 301 After making accusations like this, Nietzsche launches into a “close up” investigation of the poor, humble, chaste ascetic monks, so-called the “inventive spirits”. 302 The humble ascetics, says Nietzsche, “cannot be bothered with virtues” because they have cast in front of them “their best existence and finest productivity”. 303 The sarcasm and irony are thick in this single passage – though these are literary devices that Nietzsche frequently uses.

On Nietzsche’s account, the desert monks sought their intellectual interests first, while fighting off their wanton sensual desires. 304 This fight must have been a struggle for them, declares Nietzsche, as these laboured “hand and soul to maintain their will to the ‘desert’” in the face of their various penchants for “luxury and finery” or perhaps given “their extravagant generosity”. 305 Nietzsche scoffs at the “deliberate obscurity” of the monks, diagnosing these ancient, educated desert-dwellers, as perhaps avoiding themselves and ironically hiding through their nakedness while they pushed away from the “refreshing” and “harmless” landscapes and the people inhabiting them. 306

For Nietzsche, the Christian religion had poisoned society with “sickrooms” and “madhouses”, threatening humanity’s “slightest” health or success. 307 It is the sick equated with the hallowed poor, humble and chaste ascetics who are the greatest danger to the healthy – “harm comes to the strong,” writes Nietzsche, “not from the strongest but from the weakest.” 308 To Nietzsche’s way of thinking, these sickly (weak) ones severely threaten (more so than the wicked do) any hope of success or human progress with their “sad, backward and misfit glances” whilst they sit in their powerful swamps of “self-contempt”. 309 These, the sick and weak, although “so small,

---

298 GM I.14, 27.
299 GM III.8, 78 (italics added).
300 GM III.1, 68.
301 GM III.8, 78.
302 GM III.8, 78.
303 GM III.8, 78 (italics added).
304 GM III.8, 78.
305 GM III.8, 78.
306 GM III.8, 78.
307 GM III.14, 92.
308 GM III.14, 89 (italics added).
309 GM III.14, 89.
hidden, dissembling and sugary”, are more than capable and culpable, with one woeful glance to impart their “will to nothingness” – rendering the victorious man and his will to freedom as “hated” and vilified. These ascetics, called out as “failures”, pour forth “noble eloquence ... from their lips” and “sugary, slimy humble humility [with] their eyes!” In the end, Nietzsche critiques Christian humility as only a “useful” transactional trait for working off debt, or a tool used to pay back the creditor, the slave master—the Hangman. Nietzsche includes humility, not on a list of virtues but rather as the very centre of a list of slavish Christian qualities like “compassion, the obliging helping hand, the warm heart, patience, diligence, [and] friendliness”. For Nietzsche, these sugary traits garnishing Christian humility, including Christianity itself, were all to be abandoned for a gay new world.

Summary of the Modern Critiques of Christian Humility

In this chapter, I examined the writings of three philosophers of the modern era who have significantly influenced the literature related to perceptions of Christian humility as external critiques of the virtue. The first was David Hume, who argued that Christian humility is a useless “monkish virtue” and—in actual fact—not a virtue at all but a vice to be avoided by all “sensible men”. Hume deduced that noble pride in oneself and one’s accomplishments were natural, good and pleasurable while humility brought with it only feelings of displeasure and uneasiness. Hume concluded that the vicious nature of humility, with its contempt for life, was not meant for a thriving, living world, and must therefore be eradicated from modern society. Thus, Hume objects to humility on aesthetic grounds, defined by using notions of pleasure or pain.

Second, Immanuel Kant reconceived humility as a disposition that does not disparage the intrinsic good and dignity of the human person. Instead, for Kant, when humans are exposed to and begin to understand the Moral Law of the universe and their rightful duties in light of it, they feel humbled. I pointed out that Kant argues against notions of self-denial or self-abasement, including its opposite, self-conceit. I showed that for Kant, the rational person is enabled to understand the Moral Law, and because of that understanding, they give an honest estimation of their inconsistencies at keeping and fully measuring up to their duties in the world, which is humbling for anyone. On Kant’s model, the humble person fulfils first their self-regarding duties to themselves, which is to view themselves as having inherent worth and human dignity. On this basis, they are then able to find the inner courage and strength to ultimately change and make progress in the

310 GM III.14, 90.
311 GM III.14, 90 (italics added).
312 Cf. GM II.22, 64 and GM III.18, 100 as previously discussed.
313 GM in “Supplemental Material 260”, 156.
pursuit of the moral life. Thus, Kant objects to Christian humility on grounds that it does not allow for a robust concept of human dignity and autonomy.

Third, Friedrich Nietzsche disavows the Christian religion, which only produces a bad conscience in its followers and denies them a happy future with its vision of humility. Nietzsche rejected Christian humility and the ascetics who propagated it, arguing that it was not virtuous, but rather borne out of a sickly ideal of weakness with a maddening need to appease God and assuage guilt. Nietzsche labelled such ideals as “sugary” lies and repudiated any notions of showing excessive deference to God, the holy creditor and Hangman of humanity. Under the flagship of a slavish guilt-driven morality, Nietzsche believed that Christian humility doomed humans to a life of self-contempt, self-abasement, sadness and gloom. Such a horrific moral system created and helped maintain “madhouses”, he contended, which only served to halt success, knowledge and human victory rather than pushing a healthy humanity towards its rightful and natural will to freedom and power in a new world of modernity and enlightenment. Thus, Nietzsche objects to Christian humility by means of a genealogical and philosophical critique that espouses ideals of individual human power and self-affirmation which he deems is not only absent but impossible within the framework of the Christian religion or any such notion of humility.

Each of these modern philosophers rejects Christian humility conceived in terms of self-contempt or through self-abasing practices and behaviours. These modern critiques cast doubt on whether Christian humility is virtuously good, necessary, or perhaps it is inimical for a modern society. Such objections won the day in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continue to influence how scholars approach and think about the moral virtue of Christian humility today. In chapter three, I evaluate some of the theories found in contemporary literature, whereby scholars attempt, from the perspective of an internal critique, to portray Christian humility in ways that rescue it from these outside and pervasive modern critiques. They seek to offer Christian humility back to the world and to the church as a useful and necessary moral virtue. I conclude chapter three by explaining my approach to conceiving Christian humility, which draws concepts from the lifelong learning theory in the field of contemporary education. I elucidate the background of lifelong learning and what it entails in chapter four. Then, to show how this theory works, I turn to examine the well-known, medieval saint, Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) by first providing his historical context of the high Middle Ages and recounting his biography. Finally, I analyse Francis’s
troublesome example of Christian humility by interpreting it through the lens of the lifelong learning theory.
Chapter 3: Attempts at Rehabilitating Christian Humility in Contemporary Thought

In the previous two chapters, I presented the development of thought and practice, over time, related to the moral virtue of humility, ending with the modern critiques of Christian humility that were developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I explored selected passages from the influential writings of philosophers like, Hume, Kant and Nietzsche. I showed how they rejected notions of self-contempt and any type of Christian humility that calls a person to be self-abasing or self-effacing, labelling it outdated, slavish, and contrary to human flourishing in a modern society. In light of these critiques, contemporary scholars have sought, in various ways, to re-establish, rehabilitate or reenvisage perceptions about Christian humility, contending that it is a necessary moral virtue for use in today’s church and in the world. In this chapter, I analyse some of these theories found in contemporary literature which are derived using one of two approaches.

Contemporary Approaches

Scholars in the field of biblical studies and theology employ the first approach, to underscore how the thoughts and practices of Christian humility have all but disappeared in today’s world, by and large because of the modern critiques that I delineated in chapter two. For this reason, these researchers seek to rescue some notion of Christian humility by reverting to the theories that were practised during pre-modern times. Note that the models I present here are not meant to address or be less vulnerable to the modern critiques. On the contrary, these scholars contend that today’s world is overwhelmed with self-promotion and self-aggrandisement to such an extent that it needs the reprisal of largely pre-modern ways of thinking about Christian humility, including its various forms of self-denial and self-reproach to promote an authentic and active faith.

The second approach to Christian humility is found in a growing corpus of contemporary literature wherein scholars, sympathetic to the modern critiques, attempt to give relief to these objections as best they can, whilst maintaining humility’s prominence and reputation as it is reflected in the religious and biblical traditions. These theories represent a shift of sorts, whereby scholars hope to reconcile the realities of today’s modern world with the “checkered history” of Christian humility as it was understood and practised in the past.314 Researchers who adhere to this second approach start with the premise that the modern critiques, which reject self-abasement and the outdated practices of Christian humility, are accurate or offer at least a fair assessment of the moral virtue. From here, the theories representing this approach are focused less on gaining back lost ground (like in the first approach) and more on a desire to evaluate Christian tradition, with the

modern critiques in view, to determine the best way forward today. The second approach is devised to do what others have not done, which is to hold in tension, if possible, both the needed internal religious tradition and the external modern critiques as a way to offer a compatible theory of Christian humility for a modern world. It is to this second category of approaches to Christian humility that I hope to contribute with this thesis.315

Reverting to Past Theories

As previously explained, the theologians and biblical scholars, who have adopted this first approach to rehabilitating perceptions of Christian humility, contend that the modern critiques have all but erased notions of the moral virtue from the general awareness of people in modern church culture today.316 This includes the removal of the term “humility” from the literature as a topic of Christian study and research.317 For this reason, the theories that I present in this section represent one way researchers hope to bring back the practice and study of Christian humility to the forefront of the moral life of the church. This task will not prove easy as Belgian writer and modern Cistercian, André Louf notes, humility is not “an easy topic to speak of, particularly, today … [because] in the eyes of Nietzsche, humility is the great lie of the weak”.318 Louf argues that from the point of view of modern psychologists, humility is “a form of the masochistic guilt complex … bringing about feelings of inferiority” which they assume has caused great harm to modern culture’s psyche.319 Not unlike Louf’s thinking on humility, Jesuit theologian, Brian Daley mourns the fact that speaking in the public forum on the moral virtue of “humility” will no doubt be received with indignation.320 For if humility is portrayed, writes Daley, as a “self-emptying service” to God or as a “sacrifice [with] self-effacing” qualities, these depictions are immediately rejected as human “subjugation”.321

Thus, as I demonstrate below, scholars using the first approach unapologetically seek to pull back into the moral mainstream of contemporary life the past theories and accounts of Christian humility. There is a third approach in contemporary literature, which is important, but not pertinent to this thesis. See the Appendix where I discuss how, starting with the work of Philippa Foot in the 1970s, scholars began devising ways of depicting humility that were foundationally detached from religious tradition or need for the transcendent. Some of these models are based on the notion that humility is a “corrective virtue” in the realm of human-to-human relationships. On this account, a humble person is able to assess themselves rightly in relation to others and lower or raise themselves appropriately. These studies have generated much debate and various accounts of humility over the past five decades. However, I contend that these theories are confusing, impractical and do not necessarily evade the modern critiques.

humility. To this end, I present four indicative examples of this approach found in contemporary literature. The first three draw from past ideals of Christian humility as they were devised by, for example, Benedict’s *Rule* or Ignatius of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*. The fourth example represents an exercise in systematic theology whereby humility is reconstructed using several sources from the realm of Christian theology and tradition as well as the biblical text. After describing these four examples, I provide a critique of them before moving on to the second category of approaches to which I give greater attention since it is to this body of literature that I hope to contribute with this thesis.

**Louf — The Monastic Ideal**

Louf contends that the concept of Christian humility has been forgotten by people in today’s world.\(^\text{322}\) He argues that the “concrete” practices of humility that were engendered by the monks of the monastic period represent the humility that is required by all Christian persons today, whether they live in a monastery or not.\(^\text{323}\) Louf ties together notions of humility and the practice of humiliations “in rigorous fashion”, asserting that these are indications of a person’s salvation, which is rooted in the fear of God.\(^\text{324}\) Louf argues that Benedict’s “Steps” as they are presented in his *Rule* are to be revitalised for Christians to practise in the modern world. On the basis of the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux, Louf highlights the insistence that there can be no virtue of humility without the act of “self-abasement”.\(^\text{325}\) Louf includes in his discussion the thoughts presented in the writings of the desert monk, Isaac the Syrian (c. seventh century) who asserted that “a humble person does not upset anyone ... is not upset by anyone [and] remains unnoticed ... like the soul which is unseen and unknown.”\(^\text{326}\) In his teaching on Christian humility, Isaac points to New Testament texts such as Matthew 10:25 where Jesus says, “it is enough for the disciples to be like the teacher and the slave like the master” to which Isaac argues that the authentic disciple of Christ will, in humility, sacrifice their very lives, giving “glory to Him who comes from the Father”.\(^\text{327}\)

**Pansters — Franciscan Writings**

The next author I consider, Dutch theologian, Krijn Pansters, analyses Franciscan writings, such as those of German Franciscan, David of Augsburg (1200-1272).\(^\text{328}\) Pansters draws from the

\(^{322}\) Louf, 2007, 10.

\(^{323}\) Louf, 2007, 10ff.

\(^{324}\) Louf, 2007, 28, 31 (italics added).

\(^{325}\) Louf, 2007, 28.

\(^{326}\) Louf, 2007, 47.

\(^{327}\) Louf, 2007, 49.

\(^{328}\) Krijn Pansters, “Franciscan Virtue: Spiritual Growth and the Virtues in Franciscan Literature and Instruction of the Thirteenth Century” in *Studies in the History of Christian Traditions*, vol. 161, ed. Robert J. Bast (Leiden: Brill, 2012). Pansters’s explanation of “virtue” and how the concept might have been understood in the
Profectus religiosorum (or Set of Religious Writings) which in parts contains (like other summae of the scholastic period) lengthy lists of virtues along with their accompanying descriptions. For example, Pansters recounts the following:

Humility is one of the virtues (humility, charity, obedience, meekness, and care in giving good example) in which a good religious should exercise himself constantly; and, more importantly, one of the seven key virtues of spiritual progress (charity, humility, patience, obedience, poverty, sobriety, and chastity) in David’s sixth stage of religious life. These virtues (viz., humility, patience, poverty, and obedience) are to be developed in faithful imitation of Jesus Christ. Humility is one of the fruits of prayer (faith, hope, charity, humility, perseverance, and desire to please God), and it belongs to the ‘remedial’ virtues (humility, love of one’s neighbour, meekness, love of God, contempt of riches, sobriety, and chastity) that oppose the capital vices.

From here, Pansters highlights David’s three degrees of humility which are 1) “that a man knows himself for what he is and recognizes that he is poor and weak, void of good, inclined to evil – a sinner”, 2) that a man recognizes his own “lowness” in determining “the estimate of himself”, bearing “patiently with contempt on the part of others” and “devoid of self-love” with hope that others might share “the same opinion he has of himself as one poor, ignoble and prone to vice”, and 3) that a man, “despite outstanding gifts of nature and grace, or high honours attained are not ... inclined to flatter themselves, but attribute all to God.” Pansters asserts that the humble person, as described in the Profectus, “[holds] back from self-assertion” which comes to a person first with “benignity”, or acts of kindness towards others, followed by an obedient “compliance” with those who are in authority, and ending with the humble person seeking to live a life that is characterised by material and spiritual poverty.

Pansters argues, from David’s account, that the practice of the moral virtue of humility “leads us towards the truth”. The humble person knows the truth about themselves, that they are...
“unworthy” and sinful.\textsuperscript{334} On this basis, they allow themselves “to be humbled” and they “humiliate” themselves, following “a perfect example of self-humiliation … in the saints and in Jesus Christ, who humbled Himself and who was meek and humble of heart”.\textsuperscript{335} Humility understood this way means that “in self-humiliation … [and] humiliation by others, the virtues of humility, joy (pleasure), and patience (endurance) prove to be closely connected” because “he who is perfect in humility rejoices in the humiliations to which others expose him as much as in those which he imposes upon himself”.\textsuperscript{336} Such a disposition of humility, argues Pansters, directs a person’s conversations, thoughts, and actions as they are in the presence of all humans, regardless of station or societal status.\textsuperscript{337} From David’s perspective, Pansters concludes that “true humility … is the adornment of good manners, the acknowledgement of the truth about ourselves, others, and God, and pleasure and patience in humiliation”.\textsuperscript{338}

**Daley — The Jesuits**

Daley’s approach is to reintroduce Ignatius of Loyola’s “Three Degrees of Humility” as they are delineated in the *Spiritual Exercises* from the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{339} Daley contends that the Jesuit ideal of Christian humility, as it is expressed in the *Exercises*, is mandatory for all contemporary Christian life, whether a person is a priest or a layperson.\textsuperscript{340} The practice of Jesuit humility requires that a person “lower” themselves as much as possible to secure their “eternal salvation”.\textsuperscript{341} Second, the humble person rejects any human “inclination” to riches or honour.\textsuperscript{342} Third, the humble person “is most perfect” when they imitate Christ by choosing poverty, shame and abuse, and learn to see their Christian humility by putting off human vices such as greed, avarice and pride.\textsuperscript{343} See Damian Kirkpatrick, Philip Doherty, and Sheelagh O’Flynn, eds., *Joy in All Things: A Franciscan Companion*. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{334} Pansters, 2012, 121. Pansters notes that Bonaventure shares in this notion, “humility is ‘the virtue by which a man, knowing well what he is, deems himself worthless’” (117).

\textsuperscript{335} Pansters, 2012, 122.

\textsuperscript{336} Pansters, 2012, 122.

\textsuperscript{337} Pansters, 2012, 121.

\textsuperscript{338} Pansters, 2012, 122. Pansters has since put out a work wherein he seeks to show how a model of humility such as this might be practical today. He concludes that “the moral virtues grow through education, deliberate acts, and perseverance in struggle. Divine grace purifies and elevates them” (2). See *Spiritual Morality - the Religious Orders and the Virtues, 1050-1300* (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2019). Other scholars contend that a Franciscan humility is marked by “Gospel simplicity, poverty, self-sacrifice, and taking on a discipline of prayer” (74). In this regard, Franciscan poverty provides the humble person with “a liberating force of spirit” which aids them in removing “all the anxieties of this life” (74). On this model, a person shows their Christian humility by putting off human vices such as greed, avarice and pride (74). See Damian Kirkpatrick, Philip Doherty, and Sheelagh O’Flynn, eds., *Joy in All Things: A Franciscan Companion*. (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{339} I delineated Ignatius’s exercises in chapter one (p.36).

\textsuperscript{340} Daley, 1995, 5. Daley argues that for any practising Jesuit today, Ignatius’s way of expressing humility must at least be tried for the sake of church renewal (5).

\textsuperscript{341} *SE*, 37.

\textsuperscript{342} *SE*, 37.
themselves as worthless fools in the world, rather than “wise or prudent”.

Daley contends that humility, as a virtue to be pursued and practised, has lost its significance today due to the influx of the modern ways of thinking. He supports his claim by charting the historical rise and prominence of Christian humility throughout pre-modernity as it was expressed and practised through the spiritual lives and writings of influential monks from the fourth and fifth centuries, such as John Cassian (360-435) and Benedict, or the church fathers, like Augustine. From these accounts, Daley writes of a forgotten “monastic humility” which represents authentic Christian faith and discipleship. Daley describes this sort of humility as “mortifying” desires, doing nothing that is not “urged by the Rule” or by those in authority, remaining content with “the worst” of things in the world, considering oneself “unworthy” and inferior to “all others in the community”, and finally as restraining one’s voice and tongue, without an eagerness towards laughter.

Daley challenges the notion that Christian humility, as modelled by Ignatius and these other monastics, is contrary to human flourishing, or only “a low estimate of oneself”. Daley asserts that humility of this kind grows from “the experience of grace, of being loved by God in Christ, and precisely as a creature with no claim on that love because of one’s own merits”. The practices of humility, argues Daley, are not easy and require constant reflection on the passion and death of Christ. On Ignatius’s account, the highest level of Christian humility is considered “sharing in Christ’s poverty” by becoming poor, frail, and unknown as a human being. Daley concludes his account by asserting that Christian humility conceived with the aid of the past ideals of Ignatius and others does not produce a “negative self-image” or the conviction that “we are worthless”. Rather, it brings the realisation that “we are sinners” who are provided with a way back to God through practising a “self-emptying love” in the way that Christ did for us, which Daley writes, is “the height of human freedom” for the humble person.

Levering — Systematic Theology

Systematic theologian, Matthew Levering puts forth a model of Christian humility by appealing to past and recent thinking expressed in the fields of Christian theology and biblical

343 SE, 37.
studies. Levering begins by presenting the writings of contemporary English theologian, John Webster and his theology of creation. On this basis, Levering writes that humility is a “lowly dependence upon God” which underscores the “creatureliness” of humans. For Levering, “humility has at its root interior the fear of God” which he takes from Bernard of Clairvaux to mean “self-knowledge” without which salvation is impossible. Levering provides support to Bernard’s conclusions using scriptural proofs such as Isaiah 57:15 wherein God’s presence is promised to his creatures who are “contrite and humble” or in Matthew 23:12 where Jesus teaches that “whoever humbles himself will be exalted”. Levering includes in his discussion, the practices of humility that were set forth by “Anselm’s seven degrees of humility”. These practices, which I delineated in chapter one, included such things as “self-contempt” and “bearing with insults”, which Levering argues helps the humble person restrain themselves from inordinate temptations and “intemperance”. For Levering, the humble person resists thinking of themselves in terms of “self-excellence” because such thoughts jeopardise a person’s “need and utter dependence” on God, which is the essence of “creaturely dignity” that characterises all humans.

Critique of Past Theories Approach

Scholars in this first category of approaches, though aware of the modern critiques against Christian humility, are unconcerned with them or opposed to them since, in their view, the influence of the modern critiques has helped to eradicate the moral virtue from the world which needs it. For this reason, it is no surprise that these accounts, delineated above, fall prey to the critiques since they are only reiterations of Christian humility in terms of the past ideals, which were the basis of the critiques in the first place. In this section, I give a critique of these contemporary attempts to reinstate past notions of Christian humility into modern society. I argue that the reuse of these past theories, as viable ways to rehabilitate Christian humility’s reputation in today’s world, remains problematic. I contend, in alignment with the arguments of Hume, Kant and Nietzsche, that each of these self-abasing and self-lowering models, which have been reformulated and drawn out from concepts of the past, continue to be outdated, impractical and are perhaps inimical when applied to

353 Levering, 2017, 462ff. Levering expands on this notion of creatureliness throughout his piece starting from Webster’s viewpoint which he then supports using Christian and biblical tradition.
354 Levering, 2017, 480 (See Levering’s footnote# 93).
355 Levering, 2017, 490.
the context of today’s church.

Invoking past monastic ideals, Louf insists on a type of Christian humility that is based upon notions of humiliation and self-abasement. Pansters’s model recalls degrees of humility and the need for obedience, humiliations and compliance to those in authority, including the humble person’s own sense of unworthiness. Daley asserts that the humble person is to consider themselves “worthless fools” and “inferior” to others which somehow transports them to the “heights of freedom”. Lastly, Levering brings back Anselm’s notion of self-contempt and argues that Christian humility means that a person understands their “lowly dependence” on God as his creatures. Considering such accounts, the modern objections remain intact. Hume’s critique that humiliation, self-abasement, and thoughts of unworthiness are “monkish” and unpleasant still holds true for people in today’s world. Kant’s concern that a person who practises self-contempt jeopardises a right understanding of their human dignity continues to resonate with contemporary thinking. Nietzsche’s critique that humble Christians are enslaved by a needless moral battle against guilt, sinfulness and the insurmountable debt they owe to God seems conceptually indistinct from Daley’s humble “freedom” or Levering’s creaturely “dependence”.

While scholars in this category of approaches acknowledge that past accounts of humility are not to be taken to extremes and are safeguarded within the context of God’s grace, such qualifications do not change the fact that self-abasing forms of Christian humility remain problematic, if not short-sighted and simplistic in a complicated and ever-changing modern world. Moreover, these accounts seem unclear as to their practice outside the walls of a monastery which renders them mostly unhelpful or at best, an ideal to pursue because of human failure and guilt and not, for example, because of human dignity and God’s inner working of grace. The monastic ideal of Christian humility, as it is depicted in the Rule of Benedict and from the writings of Isaac of Syria, might continue to work in a monastery but how are these notions (i.e., for a person to become frail and unknown) useful or necessary today, and how do they apply to the context of a Christian businessperson or entrepreneur in modern society? For that matter – how do these ideals translate into today’s church context at all? If church members practised a type of human frailty and self-contempt, seeking to be unknown, lacking personal self-assertion, it remains unclear how the church is able to care for itself, much less the world around it.

I agree that the modern world is replete with harmful theories of self-pursuits and power plays, which likewise infect the church context. However, to reincorporate past (mostly monastic) models of Christian humility seems to inadvertently promote a dynamic whereby those who are in positions of power stay in those positions whether they should or not. In this regard, it is not evident
how these old theories help to deter these types of bad behaviours and practices today. A case could be made that “obedience to authority” and compliance are useful as they relate to keeping the peace of an institution, making needed changes and improvements, or maintaining some level of unity within a community. However, notions such as these do not bode well, for example, for the modern concern that Christian humility expressed through a person’s obedience and submission keeps women and other marginalised groups perpetually downtrodden and only maintains the status quo.

Lastly, for a humble person to think less of their material possessions, while a biblical concept, is not easily measured nor is it applicable in the same way for every person given that the socioeconomic levels in today’s world are not only varied but complicated. Thus, I argue that the examples in this approach, while attracting the support of others who lament “the silent passing of humility”, lack clear direction as to their practical use and the safeguards against their misuse in the modern world and in the church. In the end, reviving past monastic versions of Christian humility evokes the lingering modern critiques, if not other issues and concerns, as they once did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Seeking a Compatible Model

In dealing with this second category, I examine key ideas and themes from three contemporary works, which are representative of the scholarship on Christian humility in relation to this approach. First, I examine the work of biblical scholar, Stephen Pardue, who advocates for an “empowering” sort of Christian humility. Pardue hopes to appease the modern concerns that humility encourages, for example, women and minority groups to remain obedient or in various subjugated positions of powerlessness in society. To this end, he pulls from a wide range of Christian sources, most notably the biblical text and theological tradition represented by the likes of Augustine in the West and Gregory of Nyssa (335-395) in the East (today: Cappadocia, Turkey), including “the import of humility [from] the monastic tradition”. Second, theologian, Jane

---

358 See, for example, Luke 12:15, “And [Jesus] said to them, ‘Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of one’s possessions.’” See also, the sad ending to the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:22 and Mark 10:22.
359 Pardue, 2013, 67. I wish to note that there is a growing practice in contemporary literature which distinguishes an intellectual humility and a moral humility. Intellectual humility falls generally into a field of study, called “virtue epistemology”. For this thesis, I do not make these sorts of distinctions, nor do I enter the debates surrounding the broader field of virtue and epistemology. I concur with Linda Zagzebski, who argues that intellectual humility is “a subclass” of moral humility, claiming that moral virtue is inseparable from intellectual virtue. See Linda Zagzebski’s work, Exemplarist Moral Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 39ff. Zagzebski writes that “although ... we admire natural intellectual talent differently from the way we admire moral virtues, ... we admire intellectual virtues in the same way we admire the moral virtues (39,
Foulcher models Christian humility using concepts from “Neo-Monasticism”, which offers contemporary interpretations of the monastic sorts of Christian humility from pre-modernity offering positive and refreshing new insight for today’s world. Lastly, the recent work of philosopher, Kent Dunnington considers the full weight of the modern critiques. Dunnington shows an understanding of and sympathy towards these objections, which he couples with an analysis of Christian humility that he draws from the writings and practices of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fifth century.

Pardue — Christian & Biblical Tradition

Pardue contends that while it seems Hume’s “excoriation” of Christian humility has kept theologians and biblical scholars distant from and leery of the virtue, on the contrary, “humility lives on – indeed thrives – in spite of the critiques lodged against it.” However, Pardue admits that there are “challenges” to be reckoned with such as those expressed by contemporary “feminist and womanist scholars” who, for Pardue, have “presented legitimate and lasting concerns” that are akin to Hume’s and Nietzsche’s critiques in the modern era. Pardue’s concern with these types of modern objections is one of the first distinguishing features of this approach to portraying Christian humility in contemporary literature, which sits in contrast to the first approach that I presented previously. In this regard, Pardue underscores the writings of modern philosopher, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) who, around the same time as Hume, wrote a treatise on the rights of women drawing similar conclusions to his regarding the problems of Christian humility. Wollstonecraft casts suspicion on the self-abasing nature of Christian humility, calling it “specious” and that which binds the “confused consciousness” of “dependent creatures”, arguing that all humans must “rise naturally out of humility” to embrace God’s love and the multitude of virtues on offer for the moral life.

Wollstonecraft argues that Christian humility is dangerous to children, for example, breaking

362 Pardue, 2013, 2.
363 Pardue, 2013, 2ff and then his conclusion on the matter, 182.
364 Pardue, 2013, 1ff.
their spirits by subjecting them to too much abasement and strictness, thus keeping them from reaching their full human potential. She writes, “I only insist that when [children, like women] are obliged to submit to authority blindly, their faculties are weakened, and their tempers rendered imperious or abject.” Thus, Pardue takes into account these concerns raised in the modern era related to both the subjugation of women and other frequently marginalised groups in pre-modern and contemporary society. He wants to answer these well-versed moral objections – seeking to provide “an empowering vision of humility.” Pardue hopes for “a productive ... version of ... humility that is less susceptible to the critiques”, correcting the “disempowering” and “dangerous ways” it has been conceived of in the past. In these ways, Pardue recognises and then validates the modern objections to Christian humility, especially as they relate to how past theories have played a part in keeping the marginalised downtrodden while elevating the powerful to places of unaccountable leadership. Pardue does not lament the absence of Christian humility in the world but rather, he laments that the moral virtue as it was understood and practised in the past is partially to blame for encouraging a type of human subjugation which has often led to a sense of powerlessness and even oppression for those groups who are most vulnerable in society.

Pardue draws from the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, who presents Moses as an exemplar of humility in In Canticum Canticorum (or Song of Songs). Pardue writes that “Gregory defends the purpose of using virtuous exemplars as instruments of spiritual and intellectual progress”. Pardue follows trends in contemporary research whereby scholars observe the actions and traits of human examples as a way to then define the various virtues. In this regard, using Gregory’s depictions and conclusions about Moses’s humility, Pardue constructs his version of Christian humility. Gregory begins by retelling Moses’s story as a way to instruct the reader on how a person makes progress in being like God, or in the “perfection in virtue and acquaintance with God”. On the basis of this concept, Gregory contends that Moses’s humility is rightly characterised as a way to

366 Cf. VRW, 173 and 213.
367 VRW, 173.
368 For example, see Valerie Saiving’s classic piece, “The Human Situation: A Feminine View” (1960) in Woman Spirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion, eds. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 25-42. Saiving argues, “from the feminist perspective”, that Christianity or the “widespread tendency in contemporary theology” encourages women to be less assertive (25).
370 Pardue, 2013, 182 (italics added).
371 Pardue, 2013, 84.
progress towards knowing God or as a way to have “acquaintance with God”. Drawing on Moses’s example, Gregory contends that a humble person has the internal sense that there is “no stopping place” when it comes to their pursuits and future endeavours. They have a feeling of being “limitless”. In other words, for Gregory, humility begins with God through whom all things are made possible for the humble person – giving them a “limitless existence”. However, Pardue adds that the humble person, acquainted with God like Moses, does have “inherent limits as finite and fallen beings”. Pardue cautions that as close to God as Moses was, through his practice of humility, there were areas closed off to him – areas that, for Moses, remained “dark”. Pardue argues that there is an extent to which Moses is capable of bringing the Israelites only so far in their acquaintance with God because of his own human limitations. Pardue summarises that Mosaic humility starts with an acquaintance with God or “contact with God via Word and Spirit” and on the basis of this relationship, the humble person has “limitless [human] potential”.

For Pardue, when a person’s human limitation is met by “divine grace”, there is a “limitless potential [that is] activated”. Pardue makes the case that all references to Moses in the Old Testament are typologically “pointing to Christ”. Thus, however it is that Moses is an exemplar, he is limited by his human fallenness and inability to bring others into greater acquaintance with God on his own. Christ, on the other hand, surpasses these human limits, not only as they relate to himself, but also as they relate to those who “identify with Christ in his death and burial” which exalts them to “a state of overwhelmingly abundant life”. In light of this, Pardue asserts that “the stories of … Moses” demonstrate a pattern that applies to the practices of people today. For example, when a person, by divine grace, comes into “contact with the living God”, this results in “superabundant fulfillment”, which is followed by “an appropriate recognition of limitations”, leading to human improvements and “progress”.

---

380 Pardue, 2013, 102.
385 Pardue, 2013, 88. It is beyond the scope to delve into the debates regarding typology in biblical theology, but see, for example Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016). Hays’s introduction provides ample historical background and explanation to the issues at stake (1ff).
386 Pardue, 2013, 89.
participating in the closest possible way in the divine life” there is a double-sided reality.\textsuperscript{389} On the one hand, there are limits and “restraints” that frustrate a person.\textsuperscript{390} But on the other hand, there is “empowerment and liberation beyond what typically creatures can experience” – as they participate in and reflect “the mind of Christ”.\textsuperscript{391} Pardue argues that this model of Christian humility not only alleviates the modern critiques but it also remains faithful to Christian and biblical tradition. He concludes that the empowering and liberating practice of Christian humility calls the humble person to overcome their limits and to unlock their potential with the help of Christ’s unlimited power.

**Foulcher — Neo-Monasticism**

Although Pardue mentions the monastics, he does not give much space to them in his account of Christian humility, which is perhaps why Foulcher’s work, a few years later, finds a place in the literature. Neo-Monasticism or what Foulcher terms, the “New Monastic Turn” in contemporary theology and philosophy, is a companion-renewal to the new wave of interest in the study of the virtues which started in the late 1950s, and which I mentioned in the introduction. Foulcher begins by asserting that the study of the virtues is “sustained by traditions, practices and narratives”.\textsuperscript{392} Thus, Foulcher argues that “the way of humility” becomes lucid, once again, through a guided reflection upon four monastic traditions.\textsuperscript{393} Note that Foulcher resists labelling humility as a virtue until after she completes her analysis.

The monastic traditions and corresponding themes that Foulcher uses to analyse Christian humility are: 1) The Desert Monastic tradition and its understanding of the self, 2) the Rule of Saint Benedict as it reflects living in community with others, 3) the life of Bernard of Clairvaux and his practice of public activism, and lastly 4) the modern tragedy of the seven monks of Tibhirine, who were kidnapped and later found dead in Algeria in 1996. Foulcher discusses this event in light of the monks’ understanding of “the other”.\textsuperscript{394} Of note is that each of Foulcher’s chapters begins with corresponding etchings, paintings or a photograph which Foulcher draws upon throughout her

\textsuperscript{389} Pardue, 2013, 182.
\textsuperscript{390} Pardue, 2013, 182.
\textsuperscript{391} Pardue, 2013, 182. Similar by way of method, overall content and conclusions to Pardue’s work is Grant Macaskill, *The New Testament and Intellectual Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For example, as part of the discussion of humility in the context of servanthood, Macaskill contends that “union with Christ” provides the means by which “we have a category of humility that is compatible with the infinite” (163). He writes, “humility allows us to see a strand of the virtue that may be sustained even in our engagements with those whose views we consider to be wrong and, indeed, foolish. Only such a notion of servanthood can allow us to escape the problem [of] limits” (163). Macaskill’s thinking also aligns with Levering’s point about humility as it relates to human creatureliness (136).
\textsuperscript{392} Foulcher, 2015, 32.
\textsuperscript{393} Foulcher, 2015, 34.
\textsuperscript{394} Foulcher, 2015, 34.
study. I direct attention to one of these as it highlights what Foulcher argues in her research. The subtleties in Foulcher’s writing are what set it apart in the contemporary context. For example, in her first case study of the Desert Fathers, she offers the usual depiction of the early monastic period by discussing the key literature and figures such as The Sayings of the Fathers and Anthony the Great. However, Foulcher’s chapter conclusions are where she puts the impact of her research as I demonstrate below.

Foulcher presents an opening etching in her first main chapter, which depicts Anthony the Great rendered by French-born, engraver-painter Martin Schongauer (c. 1450/53–1491) and entitled, The Temptation of Saint Anthony.395 This engraving is grotesque and shows Anthony being sorely bitten and ravaged by ghouls and demons while he is being lifted up high into the air.396 The hideous and terrifying creatures portrayed by the etching pull at and attack every inch of Anthony’s body. Foulcher assesses on the basis of her reflection upon the etching that Saint Anthony seems drawn heavenward.397 To which Foulcher then writes, “Still, one cannot but be struck by the solitariness of Anthony” as he lived out his ideal of Christian humility.398 Foulcher concludes using her assessment of Anthony’s isolated and torturous lifestyle that “life in community” was a necessary and vital step in the right direction for the future of the monastic way of life for monks and nuns.399 Foulcher’s critique is that the extremes of isolation and suffering, as they were lived out by the early Desert Fathers and Mothers, are not possible, nor are they preferable in today’s world and in the church. Foulcher then turns to consider Christian humility in terms of Benedict’s notion of community as it is outlined in his Rule.

Similar to her discussion of Anthony, Foulcher is not ready to endorse the communal life that is delineated in Benedict’s Rule as the optimal choice for modelling Christian humility. Foulcher begins by detailing the contents of the Rule and with it, the monastic life of the order of Benedictines. She both critiques and asks the question, “a demanding call within the monastic enclosure (the Rule); is it possible at all outside the monastery wall?”400 To this question, Foulcher responds that such a life in community is not possible for the rest of the world.401 Moreover, Foulcher argues that if Bernard of Clairvaux is the preeminent example for public life and activism, it leaves “very real questions about the place of humility in the public square”.402 Finally, in the fourth

395 Foulcher, 2015, 36.
396 Foulcher, 2015, 85.
397 Foulcher, 2015, 85.
398 Foulcher, 2015, 85 (italics added)
399 Foulcher, 2015, 85.
400 Foulcher, 2015, 163.
401 Cf. Foulcher, 2015, 163.
402 Foulcher, 2015, 163.
case study concerning the Algerian, Cistercian monks of Tibhirine, Foulcher gives a type of homage to these modern-day martyrs but then asserts that “objections also clamor in the mind” about their example. That is to say, Foulcher is not convinced by the act of martyrdom or by these other extreme expressions and practices of Christian humility thus far in her study. Instead, Foulcher contends that each of these cases leaves the Christian who is living in the twenty-first century asking the question, “how might faithfulness, vocation, humility and love be lived out and practiced in both the best and worst of times?”

Thus, each of the four case studies is meant to direct the reader to the crux of Foulcher’s project, where she seeks to model Christian humility to be practised in a contemporary world according to the writings and teachings of French Cistercians, André Louf and Christian de Chergé (1937-1996). On the basis of these, Foulcher expands upon the notion that the way or “road” of humility is best expressed as “un climat” or a climate “which is not human, but upon which man is dependent if he wants to breathe freely”. For Foulcher, it is this concept of a spiritual climate that enables the humble person to access a “liberative” or freeing quality that further invites them to be who they “truly” are as “the beloved of God”. In the end, Foulcher argues for Christian humility as a disposition, which allows a person “to stand fully human” before God and “beside one another”. Foulcher hopes to reclaim this climate of Christian humility which is characterised by human freedom and God’s love for people in today’s society.

**Dunnington — Christian Theology and Virtue Theory**

Foulcher critiques the Desert Fathers, like Anthony, as too solitary and isolated, and Dunnington’s more recent work will not disagree on that point. Dunnington expands upon the writings and practices of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, eventually defending them as sources of wisdom for today and for an understanding of the true nature of Christian humility. However, Dunnington does not defend the early monastics for the sake of upholding some homage to the austere and difficult lives that they exemplified in relation to Christian humility. Rather, Dunnington’s approach is to frame these as past case studies illustrating the harsh reality of the world in which these fathers and mothers lived, which Dunnington argues is not so different from

---

404 Cf. Foulcher, 2015, 309-310. Note that Christian de Chergé was one of the seven monks killed in the controversial incident of 1996 in Algeria.
405 Foulcher, 2015, 309.
406 Foulcher, 2015, 310.
407 Foulcher, 2015, 316.
408 Dunnington, 2018, 12.
Thus, Dunnington aims to take concepts from this monastic “strand of Christian wisdom on the concept of humility” and develop them (for today’s church) into a “coherent account of humility that requires ... a distinctively Christian eschatology [or, a theology of death, judgment and end times] and theological anthropology”.

Dunnington begins by providing a survey and critique of past and current humility research, warning against “efforts to modernize humility” that is represented in large part by those scholars who separate it from the religious and biblical tradition. Dunnington claims that such accounts forget “the radical nature of humility as received and transformed by Christianity” as it was portrayed by the likes of Augustine. For Dunnington, the models of humility that dissociate it from all knowledge of religious tradition or need for the transcendent are not only reductionistic but they also “forget” humility’s rich history as the radical and transformative moral virtue that it once was. In this regard, Dunnington harkens back to Augustine’s Confessions as a touchstone for describing such “transformation” that is inherent to conceptions of Christian humility. Dunnington argues, on the basis of his interpretation of Augustine, that humility means, by grace, letting go of or “relinquishing cherished ideals”, such as wealth, status, prestige or virility to instead radically trust in Christ and his love. Dunnington contends that for Augustine, Christian humility is revealed through

409 Dunnington, 2018, 137ff.
410 Dunnington, 2018, 11. Note that Michael W. Austin’s work, Humility and Human Flourishing: A Study in Analytic Moral Theology (2018) represents a sort of midway point between Pardue’s conception of Christian humility and Dunnington’s account. Austin offers, what he calls, an “intuitive definition of humility as a virtue that includes both proper self-assessment and a self-lowering other-centeredness that is distinct from self-denigration, self-abasement, and egoistic pride” (90). He claims that this account is “grounded in biblical, theological (especially Christological), and philosophical reflection” and is “conducive to human flourishing” (90, 218-219). Austin argues that humility, as he has conceived it, is “rational, benefits its possessor, and contributes to its possessor being good qua human” (218-219). (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198830221.001.0001, Accessed 9 June 2021.
411 Dunnington, 2018, 11. See the Appendix at the end of this thesis wherein I give an overview of these types of nonreligious accounts of humility in contemporary research. A good example of this type of research is Jennifer Cole Wright’s recent edited volume, Humility (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190864873.001.0001, Accessed 10 June 2021. To be clear, some scholars who espouse these models do acknowledge or mention God but the renderings are foundationally construed, for example, by using concepts drawn from the fields of modern psychology and philosophy. As Dunnington points out, they are typically separated from religious or biblical tradition. Then, there are scholars, such as Erik J. Wielenberg who “hold that there is a character trait that (a) merits the title ‘secular humility,’ (b) is a virtue, (c) has some important similarities with Christian humility, and (d) requires neither belief in anything like the God of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam nor the existence of such a deity” (42). See "Secular Humility" in Wright’s Humility (2019), 41-63, DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780190864873.003.0003, Accessed 10 June 2021.
412 Dunnington, 2018, 11.
413 Cf. Dunnington, 2018, 11ff.
414 Dunnington, 2018, 35.
415 Dunnington, 2018, 34 and Dunnington, 2016, 29.
a person’s submission and second, through a person’s relinquishment of their most “cherished self-understandings”. Dunnington builds a case for a “radical Christian humility” which “proscribes proper (or noble) pride, including any concern ... [for] one’s own distinctive importance” which Dunnington calls a “no concern” or an “unselfing” account of Christian humility. What Dunnington means by no concern or unselfing is that the “radically” humble person resists contemporary society’s relentless pull towards the human self-quest (or quest for the ego), which is devised through any number of “selfing projects”, such as the pursuit of perfect physical beauty, economic freedom or personal ideals, attempting to provide self-worth apart from God. Dunnington explains that during the normal course of life, humans experience countless instances of “disappointment and humiliation” (or affliction and suffering) which cause them to shuffle, amend and revise their selfing projects accordingly. Moreover, another way to cope with inevitable humiliation in today’s world, writes Dunnington, is to “flip the script”. An example that Dunnington gives for this phenomenon in today’s culture is when a person feels shame or humiliation for their “indecisiveness”, the person can choose to flip the script and instead think of their indecisiveness “as a mark of intelligence”. Dunnington claims that oftentimes these selfing projects hide behind notions of proper or noble pride which blind a person to the sort of pride that keeps them from looking up to God for help and reassurance. Dunnington defends his position using research from a range of disciplines like psychology and “Christian doctrines of the cross and the Trinity”, asserting that these latter should shape a Christian person’s perspective on all virtue theories.

In the end, Dunnington “interprets monastic wisdom about the pursuit of humility” in the following terms – as “a gift of grace” which “is unattainable apart from experiences of humiliation”. However, Dunnington admits that humans lack the ability to produce, stop, or grasp grace or the experience of humiliation. This is where Dunnington departs from the monastics. For

---

416 Dunnington, 2018, 44 and Dunnington, 2016, 29.
417 Dunnington, 2018, 71.
418 Dunnington, 2018, 81ff.
419 Dunnington, 2018, 81.
420 Dunnington, 2018, 81.
421 Dunnington, 2018, 81.
422 Dunnington, 2018, 83.
423 Dunnington, 2018, 79ff.
424 Dunnington, 2018, 71.
425 Dunnington, 2018, 137.
426 Dunnington, 2018, 139. Dunnington touches on long-held theological debates, which are beyond the scope of this thesis. He writes, “Here we enter one of the most vexed controversies in Christian theology, the root of some of the deepest divisions in Christian history —Augustine from Pelagius, Protestants from Roman Catholics, and Arminians from Calvinists.” (139).
Dunnington, Christian humility is to a large extent “unachievable” through the multitude of ways that humility is modelled in contemporary literature, including the ways that it was practiced during the early monastic period by the Desert Fathers and Mothers.427 Instead, Dunnington contends that the humble person is the “rare” one who, upon experiencing excruciating and terrible humiliations, affliction and suffering in this life, is enabled, by God’s grace, to turn towards Christ’s love “alone”, rather than trying to flip the script or inventing and re-inventing new selfing projects as means to re-establish personal ideals or self-worth apart from God.428

Although Dunnington’s modelling of Christian humility allows for practices that prepare a person for the humiliations of life (i.e., times of silence, isolation or fasting), Dunnington asserts that such practices do not equate to or take the place of what it truly means to be humble.429 Instead, Christian humility, on Dunnington’s account, is the rare moral virtue, which is inevitably pressed out of the human person during tragic, humiliating and crushing life circumstances whereby the humble person trusts “Christ’s love” and relinquishes personal ideals and the modern inclination to reorder and reinvent their lives apart from God.430 Dunnington concludes that:

We ‘position’ ourselves to receive the gift of radical Christian humility when, in the midst of humiliation, we do not turn from the love of God. Radical Christian humility, then, is achieved not through normal habituation, but rather by finding ourselves in a position, through humiliation, to let God’s love sustain and energize us when there are no available human resources for love.431

Critique of Models in theCompatibilist Approach

Pardue

Each of the three theories that I have presented has merit. That these scholars are concerned with or sympathetic to the modern critiques of Christian humility (i.e., to gender inequality and marginalised peoples) makes them stand out because it shows a willingness to further the dialogue and learning related to humility’s tattered history. However, there are other concerns. Pardue’s desire to address issues of power and human inequality related to Christian humility, and for that matter, the Christian religion, is admirable and needed. Still, just how Pardue’s theory is practically meant to emancipate and empower a person seems unclear. Pardue asserts that as the humble person, by grace, comes into acquaintance with God they experience a “superabundant fulfillment” – but Pardue does not give an adequate explanation as to what that means in terms of human experience. Sadly, Pardue admits that this “fulfillment” is capped (or squelched) by a

427 Dunnington, 2018, 139ff.
428 Cf. Dunnington, 2018, 149ff.
429 Dunnington, 2018, 138-139.
430 Dunnington, 2018, 154.
431 Dunnington, 2018, 154.
recognition of human limitations. Then, Pardue inches back further and claims that these limitations are real and present for all humans but with the caveat that, through Christ, the humble person is enabled to push beyond themselves and their personal deficiencies. The model feels like two steps back and then one large step forward “in Christ” which should add up to human flourishing, but it remains unclear as to how it does that.

There is concern that for an already powerless person, by cultural and societal standards, being reminded of their limits and disadvantages does not empower them but inadvertently leaves them downtrodden. Pardue’s conclusion that Christian humility empowers a person as they seek to live out their “limitless” potential in Christ does not offer suggestions as to what it looks like for the humble person to pursue this type of virtuous life – intellectually, morally or otherwise. Nor does Pardue’s theory explain how exactly the humble person comes to know if they are achieving their highest potential or not. Moreover, for those individuals and groups who have experienced inequality or the abuse of power as a way of life in society, how are these to appropriate practically their highest potential when they have perhaps never considered themselves to have potential in the first place?

Thus, what remains problematic about Pardue’s theory is that try as it might, it does not feel empowering but rather negative and disadvantaged as it launches from a place of human limitation for people who, as Pardue points out early on, are already oppressed and disempowered. From there, the model only seems to offer an intangible and vague sense of hope for rising up as the humble person somehow takes on “the mind of Christ”. In other words, at the same time that an acquaintance with God gives a person excessive fulfilment, the humble person is pulled back down by their shortcomings and lackings only then to be brought back up in Christ to some “higher” potentiality. The model seems like a fluctuation of sentiment with no determinable destination and subsequently no practical way for “empowering” the humble person who wishes to gauge their progress or to know their personal potential, including its effects on others.

Furthermore, Pardue’s theory does not consider or have a way to address those in current positions of power or church leadership, which any rendering of Christian humility should be capable of doing. For these, the model seems either inconsequential or could be interpreted as a way to encourage or to excuse abuse of authority. There is an extent to which Pardue, in wanting to fashion a theory of Christian humility for the powerless has ostensibly trapped the ones he had hoped to free and given more power to the already powerful. On Pardue’s model, leaders could tell themselves, or claim to others, that they are merely seeking to reach their highest potential in Christ.
as they govern unjustly or with their own personal ideals and agendas in view, with no practical accountability.

For these reasons, Pardue’s theory, which claims “empowerment”, seems like the opposite, drawing the humble person back to their inadequacies and shortcomings, which induces self-comparisons with no discernible or practical way to escape powerlessness and feelings of inequality and prejudice. The model gives license for leaders to abuse or misuse their positions. In the end, Pardue’s account might have the right underlying motivation, but it fails to deliver a Christian humility that evades the modern critiques or that offers hopeful and practical help to the disempowered of society, or to the modern church and its leaders who are in desperate need of it.

Foulcher

Foulcher’s unwillingness to label Christian humility as either a vice or a virtue at first seems prudent, particularly in relation to the modern critiques. Her way to acknowledge the modern objections is to delay qualification or judgment about the goodness of Christian humility until it can be properly analysed and evaluated. Thus, Foulcher’s method is to provide a rendition of Christian humility’s most notable figures, like Anthony, Benedict and Bernard, including the contemporary monks in Algeria with an air of interest and fascination before she then rejects them outright with her critiques. For example, Foulcher calls into question Anthony’s extreme isolation and Benedict’s overbearing and restrictive monastic Rule as unhelpful and dangerous for a modern world, leaving ample room for her to display her own theory of Christian humility. Foulcher’s answer to the shortcomings from the pre-modern monastics, including those today, is to call instead for a different “way of humility” that offers a quiet invitation to be your true self as “the beloved of God” which means that the humble person is enabled to be “who they are”.432 Foulcher’s theory seems overly simplistic and perhaps glib, for example when read in the historically rich context of theologians like Augustine or Aquinas.

While such a theory of Christian humility is socially appealing because it strips away the problematic associations with monastic extremes, it does so at a cost. Christian humility that is conceived by the likes of Louf and Chergé as some sort of spiritual, nonhuman “climate” does little to clarify what humility is or how it functions in the transformative pursuit of the virtuous moral life today. Foulcher’s theory is reductionistic - minimising and conceptually flattening a virtue which is considered in Hebrew and Christian tradition as the central and paramount virtue that governs all human interactions. Foulcher’s unwillingness, at the start, to label Christian humility as either a virtue or a vice makes sense, because what she ends with seems unrecognisable and incoherent in

432 Cf. Foulcher, 2015, 310.
the field of virtue study. Foulcher inevitably collapses Christian humility down to what feels like a form of modern-day self-help, whereby the humble person is simply called to be themselves. Finally, I contend that Foulcher’s account does not necessarily foster community or individual transformation, but instead leads to isolation, self-obsession and social inaction – all of which contribute to maintaining a societal status quo or worse. What Foulcher has proposed is a form of Christian humility that seems devoid of conceptual teeth or practical application for the church today and its leaders.

**Dunnington**

Finally, Dunnington’s rare Christian humility, which calls the humble person to “unself”, is jolting and perhaps audacious to some. Dunnington’s deep concerns and understanding regarding the modern critiques of humility are equally striking. Dunnington gives the impression that he fully knows what he is up against if he wants to make a case for the practice of Christian humility in today’s world and in the church context. He seems fully conscious that drawing from or defending the Desert Fathers’ and Mothers’ extreme practices as “wisdom” is problematic. Thus, Dunnington’s account has the tone of an appeal. He seems sad that the world is as harsh as it is – that there is suffering, abuse of power and “destructive” humiliations which touch all human life on this planet. Dunnington’s argument against the modern world’s (including religious people’s) circuitous, exhausting and vacuous ways of handling life’s pain and tragedy *apart from God* is not wrong. To devise, instead, a radical trust in Christ and “meaningful … moral action”, including the relinquishment of cherished ideals for the sake of others and as a way to fully identify with Christ, is also worth considering for a serious, practising Christian.433

However, Dunnington’s depiction of humiliation is extreme as he asserts that it renders a person “subhuman” or as Weil writes that it “kills the soul”.434 These soul-killing humiliations, claims Dunnington, inevitably come to all humans as the crucible of humility because, through them a person has the opportunity to “become humble” by grace if they choose to unself, relinquish “identity requirements” and trust in Christ for his identity. All of this leaves the average human person who has not experienced “soul-killing” humiliations (as Dunnington’s model seems to require) outside the realm of attaining such a moral virtue at all. Perhaps surprisingly, Dunnington argues that practising forms of personal, physical or spiritual humiliations, like those of the Desert Fathers, accomplishes little to nothing in relation to a person becoming humble. Dunnington contends that when the crushing weight of humiliation comes to a person, previous “practices”

433 Dunnington, 2018, 150.
434 Dunnington, 2018, 150.
cannot compare to what real-life humiliations feel like. He asserts that a person might practise humiliations as the Desert Fathers and Mothers did and still act with great pride or false humility amid humiliations when they fall prey to them in today’s world.

In the end, Dunnington’s model of Christian humility does not survive the modern critiques, of which he is aware. Dunnington’s modelling of humility is what Nietzsche calls, “gloomy” and sickly or defeatist, making it improbable that such a humble person is capable of leading or caring for others as they sit back in what seems like an overly subdued version of the self. Nietzsche catalogues such notions of Christian humility as “a will to nothingness” because it turns the self against itself in such a way that is cruel, untimely, and ultimately soul-crushing. While Dunnington admits this possibility on his model, he explains that, because of such dangers, only the psychologically and spiritually healthy person should pursue the virtue of Christian humility. Thus, Dunnington’s account, as he admits, is reserved for the few moral elites who survive the pains of life and make it out “humble” and uncrushed by them.

If the humble person is not pursuing unselfing projects on Dunnington’s model - then what are the alternatives? Dunnington answers that the alternative for the humble person is to seek, instead, the love of Christ, but how so? How is the humble person meant to go about seeking Christ’s love in the midst of life’s suffering? Moreover, Dunnington’s account of humility runs the risk of cutting off the humble person from community as they endure the private torments of harsh humiliations in their life. Although Dunnington does not equate his theory of Christian humility with humiliation per se--the theory seems, on the one hand, undone by humiliation but on the other hand, overly reliant upon it as a means to become humble in the first place. Either way, Dunnington allows humiliations and suffering to win on his model, conceding that only the rare humble person will emerge victorious from the inevitable terrors of life. Dunnington’s humility leaves the Christian wondering when the other shoe will drop and what exactly they can do to cope with it when it does.

Dunnington’s conception of Christian humility locks in the societal status quo, especially when it comes to the inequality faced by women and ethnic minorities, keeping these already humiliated groups perpetually downtrodden and afraid of the world in which they live. The Christian humility that Dunnington portrays does reflect a picture of the grittiness and catastrophic reality of some parts of human life that Foulcher misses with her concept of “climate” and well-being. However, Dunnington’s humility, while trying to infuse hope into a world full of humiliations does the opposite. Finally, I worry that Dunnington’s radical moral humility, which is cultivated during life’s darkest hours, leaves little room for a Christian humility that might come forth across the trajectory of a life well-lived with all its moments - whether tragic, ordinary or somewhere in
between. This sort of Christian humility might be less rare and less radical on the surface but at least it hangs low enough to be accessible to those who wish to humbly lead in a world and in a church that needs them.

**Summary**

In this chapter, to situate this thesis in current research, I surveyed and critiqued examples of Christian humility which are found in contemporary literature. I explained that these theories represent scholars' attempts at reclaiming humility from the lingering effects of the modern critiques to show its usefulness and necessity in today's world and in the church. I proposed two categories of approaches, which are prevalent in the literature. First, some scholars appeal to the old theories of Christian humility, as it was practised by the monastics, arguing that such models are viable and needed today. I showed how these accounts reiterate past theories (almost verbatim) as a way to reintroduce them into modern life. These approaches uphold pertinent features of Christian humility in religious tradition, such as a dependence on God and the inner working of grace. However, they do not take seriously the external modern critiques. Second, I highlighted a growing corpus of research that seeks to hold in tension the religious and biblical traditions along with the modern critiques of Christian humility in hopes of finding a compatible way to conceive of the moral virtue, which is acceptable and useful for modern society and today's church context.

In dealing with the first category of approaches, I critiqued the theories which were modelled almost entirely on the basis of the practices and expressions found among the early monastics, such as Benedict, Bernard of Clairvaux and the *Rules* of their orders. These theories of humility require a person to be self-abasing, unseen and unknown in the world and to welcome humiliations. Much like Hume, Kant and Nietzsche, I argued that such theories of Christian humility remain unhelpful, impractical and dangerous for modern society, including the church context. I concluded that the modern critiques which once discounted these “monkish” ideals of Christian humility remained true today as they did in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Turning to the second category of approaches, I started with Pardue who argues for a type of humility that is drawn from the biblical and Christian traditions (i.e., the writings of Gregory of Nyssa) wherein the humble person is aware of their human limitations because of sin but then once united to Christ, is “empowered” to move beyond these personal limits, taking on “the mind of Christ”. I clarified that Pardue was concerned with the modern critiques as they are voiced by
“feminist and womanist theologians” today. I discussed how Pardue developed his theory using concepts from Gregory of Nyssa’s depiction of Moses’s example of humility.

From there, I explained how Foulcher depicted Christian humility by using modern interpretations of historical monastic figures and writings (called Neo-Monasticism in contemporary literature). Foulcher analysed the isolation of Anthony the Great, the life in community as described by Benedict and his Rule, and Bernard of Clairvaux’s example of public activism. Foulcher critiqued each of these pre-modern monastic case studies and included an examination of the modern martyrdom of the Algerian monks of Tibhirine. She concluded that Christian humility is best expressed by the writings of modern-day Cistercian monks, Chergé and Louf, who interpret humility as a spiritual “climat” that is capable of liberating the humble person to be their true selves as the “beloved of God”.

Finally, I elucidated parts of Dunnington’s recent exploration of Christian humility. Dunnington’s portrayal labels Christian humility as a moral virtue that is both “radical” and “rare”. For Dunnington, Christian humility is almost unachievable for anyone during any period in history. In this regard, humility is only made possible when a person experiences harsh afflictions, sufferings and perhaps unspeakable humiliations in their life. If, from experiences like these, a person chooses to radically trust in Christ’s love for them, rather than developing “selfing projects” from which to rebuild their personal identity apart from God, only then might they be considered humble and virtuous. Dunnington’s account is based on what he calls the “wisdom” of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the early monastic period.

I critiqued each of these theories as, for one, failing the modern critiques because they include concepts like humiliations, human limitations, or describe Christian humility as a rarity, reserved only for a chosen few. I also asserted that these models were impractical, confusing, and difficult for a person to measure – offering them only a vague sense of what it means to pursue a humble life, such as joining an ethereal “spiritual climate” or rising up to some notion of their human potential with God’s empowering help. I conclude that these contemporary models of Christian humility, which attempt to hold in tension the external modern critiques and religious traditions, miss the mark, leaving room for an alternative way to rehabilitate the moral virtue for use in today’s world and in the context of the church.

An Alternative Way to Rehabilitate Christian Humility

In this thesis, I propose another way to conceive of Christian humility, which appeals to Christian tradition while addressing the modern critiques — a theory that promotes human
flourishing with practical implications for modern church leadership. My approach is not an attempt to sift through monastic ideals in search of useful contemporary elements, because such methods either conceptually weaken notions of humility or make it a rare virtue. Instead, to devise my theory, I draw from and expand upon the concept of learning found in humility’s historical periphery. Using the idea of learning as a conceptual starting point, I hope to depict Christian humility as a moral virtue, which is conceptually robust, practical, not self-abasing and accessible to any Christian person who wishes to pursue the virtuous moral life today. On such a model, the humble person is capable of change and personal improvements, which includes the possibility of transformation for others. Thus, I am providing an internal critique of Christian humility by safeguarding and upholding its rich religious tradition while also appeasing the external modern critiques with a practical model that is not self-abasing.

**Humility and Learning**

By way of introduction and to lend support to my theory about Christian humility’s connection with the concept of learning, I wish to underscore and summarise a few key examples and figures previously discussed in chapter one. For example, Aristotle portrays the virtuous life as one of trial and error and the virtuous person as one who practises the fine art of consistently searching for the moral mean between the two vicious extremes of excess or deficiency. For Aristotle, as the moral person practises the cardinal virtues, such as prudence or temperance, they inevitably fail or fall short. However, the virtuous person tries repeatedly and continues to learn from their mistakes. As a result, they are able to apply what they have learned to new situations in pursuit of the magnanimous moral life.

Drawing from Hebrew scripture, I presented exemplars like Moses and King Josiah who expressed humility, not through self-abasing behaviours, but through the continual practice of looking to God and others for reassurances and help. Then using the *Talmud*, I showed that the humble person is viewed, not as lowly or blindly obedient to authority, but as a student or a constant learner in the world that *Yahweh* has created for them to grow in and improve as they cultivate the world and care for it together with others under God’s love. From there, I contended that Augustine Christianised humility, framing it in terms of looking up to God for salvation in Christ,
rather than only down in foolish pride.\textsuperscript{441} However, Augustine also discussed Christian humility in the context of Christian discipleship.\textsuperscript{442} For Augustine, humility is the fundamental virtue that, by grace, is learned, re-learned, practised daily and not merely understood as a one-time prerequisite for a person’s Christian conversion.\textsuperscript{443}

Lastly, from Aquinas’s \textit{Summa}, I clarified that Christian humility is not about self-abasing behaviour, lowly postures or irrational human subjugation, all of which Thomas (not unlike Aristotle) warns might be signs of false humility in a person.\textsuperscript{444} Instead, Thomas understands humility as a moral virtue that begins with God’s inward working of grace in a person.\textsuperscript{445} This inner working manifests itself outwardly throughout a Christian’s life as they pursue the virtuous moral life within their own unique personal and cultural contexts.\textsuperscript{446} Thomas argued that codifying specific outward acts, including how a person dresses, is problematic and not necessarily indicative of a person’s Christian humility.\textsuperscript{447} Thomas points to the fact that the pursuit of virtue, including humility, is one of trial and error, one of learning.\textsuperscript{448} For example, a person learns by prudence and temperance what it is that God requires of them in their individual situations of life and then, by grace, acts accordingly.\textsuperscript{449}

\textsuperscript{441} CONF 11.1.1, 155.
\textsuperscript{442} \textit{E} 118.3.22, 809.
\textsuperscript{443} Augustine writes: “If you were to ask me, however often you might repeat the question, what are the instructions of the Christian religion, I would be disposed to answer always and only, ‘humility’ although, perchance, necessity might constrain me to speak also of other things” (\textit{E} 118.3.22, 809).
\textsuperscript{444} \textit{ST} II, q.161, a.1.2.2.
\textsuperscript{445} \textit{ST} II, q.161, a.6.2.2.
\textsuperscript{446} Pieper, 1996, 30.
\textsuperscript{447} Pieper, 1996, 24.
\textsuperscript{448} There is growing support in contemporary literature, across disciplines, for connecting the moral virtue of humility with the notion of learning. See Stephen Cherry, \textit{Barefoot Disciple: Walking the Way of Passionate Humility} (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011). Cherry underscores this correlation asserting that to grow in humility is ‘to learn’ (10) and not merely through a process of instruction or education, but rather by God’s grace through “openness and vulnerability” (14) which are “at the heart of Christian discipleship” (18). As I discuss at length in the next chapter, in the East, the concept and practice of humility in the context of learning have remained at the centre of religious and moral education for centuries. Li asserts that “there are many virtues in addition to the cardinal moral principles that Confucianism outlines, all for guiding people on the pathway of self-cultivation. Among them, humility is central for learning” (153). Cf. Jin Li, “Humility in learning: A Confucian perspective,” \textit{Journal of Moral Education}, 45:2 (2016): 147-165, DOI: 10.1080/03057240.2016.1168736, Accessed 24 May 2021. Lastly, there are recent studies in the fields of health and medicine regarding humility and learning as well as research conducted in international studies that demonstrate the importance of “cultural humility” in the context of education (69). Here, cultural humility is defined, in short, as “a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and self-critique [wherein] there is no finish line or ability to acquire ‘competence’, as one is always in a state of lifelong learning” (71). See “Cultural Humility in Education and Work: A Valuable Approach for Teachers, Learners and Professionals,” Milton Nomikoudis and Matthew Starr James in \textit{Universities, the Citizen Scholar and the Future of Higher Education} (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016): 69-84.
\textsuperscript{449} \textit{ST} II, q.161, a.6.2.2.
The Lifelong Learning Theory & Francis of Assisi

Following this conceptual thread and expanding upon the precedent of this idea of learning, I argue for a way to conceive Christian humility that draws predominantly from a contemporary approach in the field of education, known as “lifelong learning”.\(^{450}\) The lifelong learning theory entails creative adaptability, collaboration and personal openness when it comes to a person changing or listening to criticisms, which help them grow and experience transformation.\(^{451}\) In chapter four, I delineate further what lifelong learning involves in order to show its usefulness in offering a positive, life-affirming and morally virtuous way to think about humility and the humble leader today. Christian humility conceived in terms of lifelong learning is not self-abasing. From there, I demonstrate how the lifelong learning theory works by applying it to the controversial Christian humility of the well-known, medieval saint, Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226).

Although Francis is famous for his Christian humility, there is debate over whether his humility promotes human flourishing or is only self-abasing, which disqualifies it on the grounds of the modern critiques. However, in my analysis of Francis in forthcoming chapters, I discuss this and other cases against Francis’s humility and then intervene to reconsider his example in light of lifelong learning. I demonstrate that the cases where Francis has been defined as humble are actually instances which are commensurate with the lifelong learning theory. I show that Francis was open to learning and was willing to adapt his personal lifestyle and that of his order in ways that enhanced and extended its reach and influence long after Francis died. For these reasons, I uphold Francis as a good model of Christian humility when he is viewed through the lens of the lifelong learning theory. Thus, humility that is alternatively defined as lifelong learning means that it is not self-abasing and provides a new lens through which to understand Francis’s humility, proving it to be positive and life-affirming. This approach not only resolves the modern critiques but also the debates about the questionable aspects of Francis’s humility with implications for modern church leadership, which I explore in the last chapter of the thesis. I conclude that Christian humility, when conceived in terms of the lifelong learning theory, evades the modern critiques because it is not self-abasing and provides a pathway that promotes human flourishing.


Chapter 4: Lifelong Learning

In the previous three chapters, I traced the changing perceptions of the moral virtue of humility over time. I showed how, in pre-modernity, it was considered a central virtue to all moral interactions among the Hebrews of the Ancient Near East. I explained that Augustine Christianised humility, linking it to Christ’s example and naming it the most important virtue when it comes to Christian discipleship. I introduced the lifestyles and teachings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fifth and sixth centuries who manifested Christian humility in extreme ways, such as living in isolation, practising self-abasement or self-inflicted forms of humiliation, and strictly obeying those in authority over them. Then, I demonstrated how influential modern philosophers, like Hume and Nietzsche, critiqued and rejected self-abasing Christian humility, labelling it “monkish”, an outdated and “dismal” practice and dangerous for people living in modern society.

These modern critiques proved to be persuasive arguments in their day, and they continue to influence perceptions of Christian humility. In this regard, in chapter three, I discussed ways that authors of contemporary literature have attempted to rehabilitate Christian humility in relation to these critiques, in order to repair and revive humility’s tattered reputation. I demonstrated that scholars such as Louf and Daley, in one way or another, dismiss and thereby fail the critiques because they only revert to past, self-abasing theories of monastic Christian humility. Then, I elucidated three accounts of Christian humility drawn from the scholars Pardue, Foulcher and Dunnington. I showed how their models of Christian humility seek to hold religious tradition and the modern critiques in tension so as to provide viable accounts acceptable to the world and the church today. I argued some of the merits of these but concluded that they either fail to evade the modern critiques or they portray Christian humility using concepts that seem unfitting for a moral virtue that was once considered central to the Hebrews living in the ancient world. I concluded the chapter with my thesis that an alternative way to conceive of Christian humility is in terms of lifelong learning – or what some contemporary scholars refer to as a necessary “moral virtue” for today’s society.452

Lifelong Learning — Background

To begin building the case for my theory, in this current chapter, I explain the key concepts which make up lifelong learning drawn from the field of contemporary educational research. I

include in this discussion the traits scholars use to depict what it means or looks like for a person to be a lifelong learner. On the basis of this presentation, I conclude that the lifelong learning theory provides a positive, conceptually rich, virtuously life-affirming and practical way to think about Christian humility, which evades modern critiques. Thus, this chapter and its themes and concepts serve as a reference point in the thesis to be drawn upon later as I seek to analyse Francis’s controversial humility. In this regard, I use the lifelong learning theory as a type of hermeneutical lens through which I reinterpret Francis’s practices and prove that he is a positive example of Christian humility that brings with it practical implications for today’s church and its leadership.

By way of introduction, I sketch the events surrounding the inception of lifelong learning as it came to be known in the field of Western education by pointing to a few of its key figures. From there, I give an overview of the themes and concepts which make up the lifelong learning theory. I include pertinent discussion related to how lifelong learning is conceived of in the East (i.e., from Chinese tradition). I show the ways in which Eastern teachings have influenced Western perceptions concerning lifelong learning, particularly related to understanding it in terms of a moral virtue and not only as an educational strategy for classroom success. Next, I give attention to two correlated fields of study in lifelong learning, drawing out useful concepts from each of these as significant parts of my theory for conceiving Christian humility. To conclude the chapter, I examine six identifying traits which provide the basis for what it means and looks like to be a lifelong learner or, as I argue going forward, a humble person.

In a chapter such as this, it is easy to go too far afield related to the history of learning theory and education (or the study of how humans learn) which some scholars argue dates back to the ancient Greeks, like Plato and Aristotle. In contemporary research, “learning” psychologists have, for decades, taken on the task of discovering “how various kinds of learning take place in the human brain and body”. This scholarship has drawn into it an array of relevant disciplines, including sociology, pedagogy (child learning), andragogy (adult learning), biology, and modern brain research. However, I do not hope to provide a history of learning theory but instead focus on one

455 Illeris, 2018, 86.
particular approach found in contemporary literature, commonly referred to as lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning reflects a growing corpus of literature; as Frances Ward writes, “you will find the term ... all over the place in today’s culture”, including in entire journals dedicated to the topic such as, *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning (WPLL)* which has been publishing academic work since 1999. However, scholars contend that lifelong learning and its corresponding categories such as those which I discuss in this chapter tend to be “diffuse” or unclear because the concepts and terms are, at first glance, deceptively self-evident, and necessitate further clarity and specificity. Moreover, lifelong learning remains at the centre of ongoing debate in relation to the development of educational and institutional policies and procedures, especially in the West. I touch on these latter debates only as a means to present a clear and specific picture as to what I mean by lifelong learning when it comes to modelling the moral virtue of humility in this thesis.

Finally, lifelong learning as it is understood and practised in the East dates back at least to the time of the ancient Chinese Philosopher, Confucius (551-479 BC). This early dating stands in contrast to the lifelong learning theory as it has come to be understood in the West as recently as 1970 through the work of contemporary adult educator, Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997). I say more in subsequent sections about the Eastern versus Western perceptions of lifelong learning and the impact and outcome of their intersection in contemporary literature. But first, I explore the lifelong learning theory in the historical context of modern educational strategies found in the West.

**Discoveries in the Field of Adult Education**

Malcolm Knowles argued, with the support of late-modern mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), for a decisively and (at the time) radically different learning style and educational approach in andragogy versus pedagogy. What Knowles understood was
that adults, when placed in a learning environment, bring a greater number of life experiences, including a more highly developed sense of themselves to the learning process, than do children. Because of this, Knowles asserted that adults are capable of incorporating a very high level of “self-direction” and participation when it comes to their overall learning strategy. For Knowles, this active “orientation” and “readiness” for learning in adults, including how they learn from their experiences were, in principle, transferable to the teaching of children, or rather to all humans. Today, such notions seem obvious to scholars in the field of education, but this notion of active and participatory learning stood in direct contrast to the passive and receiving-only nature of learning that characterised much of pedagogy in the early 1970s.

Knowles argued that his research indicated a need for change in the approaches to both andragogy and pedagogy, which involves taking seriously the greater depth of experience, self-understanding and self-directing ability that is intrinsic to adult learners, which is also worth exploring in child learners. Knowles’s conclusions were met with opposition by leading pedagogical theorists of the day which meant that Knowles’s work went largely “ignored” in the literature. Still, Knowles’s theory about the correlations between adult and child learning “became the beginning of a development whereby lifelong learning and adult education in the following decades became core areas for new approaches to learning, not only in adulthood but also in general.” In this regard, recent lifelong-learning expert, Peter Jarvis writes that “Knowles’s theory was not well developed, and yet his work contributed greatly to the development of learning theory” – especially related to the significance of “the experience that adults accumulate over their lifetime”.

Around the same time as Knowles, “global technical and economic developments and worldwide changes in life-conditions” necessitated cultural and social changes across all areas of human life, including education. As a result, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (or UNESCO, founded in 1945) initiated a study Commission, which in 1972 put out a pivotal and controversial report which marked the beginning of UNESCO’s plan for global strategies

---

463 Illeris, 2018, 90.
465 Illeris, 2018, 90.
466 Illeris, 2018, 90.
467 Illeris, 2018, 90.
in the realm of education.\textsuperscript{469} This report marked the tipping point towards shifts in contemporary learning theory, including the introduction of lifelong learning into the broader discussions and research.

**Contemporary Shifts in Learning Theory**

UNESCO’s 1972-report is entitled, *Learning to Be – The World of Education Today and Tomorrow*, and was edited by the former French Prime Minister of Education, Edgar Faure (1908-1988).\textsuperscript{470} In his “Preamble”, Faure, along with the other delegates on the Commission writes that “very many countries regard the education of the modern man as an exceptionally difficult problem ... [but one which has] the greatest importance.”\textsuperscript{471} Faure remarks that “some young people are now more or less protesting against the pedagogical models and types of institutions imposed on them.”\textsuperscript{472} The report is thorough, if not “radical”, emphasising “that learning was necessary for everyone during all their life and in all parts of the world” – seen as socially and personally enriching based on political models of the democratic society.\textsuperscript{473} From notions such as these came the report’s expression, the “Learning Society”.\textsuperscript{474}

According to the report, a learning society seeks “to know, to do and to be” as these “intellectual skills” provide the tools for lifelong learning.\textsuperscript{475} Eventually, UNESCO’s plan for global education and “sustainable development would take place ‘within the perspective of lifelong learning, engaging all possible spaces of learning, formal, non-formal, and informal, from early childhood to adult life’”.\textsuperscript{476} In this regard, Ward writes that “[t]he prevalence of lifelong learning indicates a shift of emphasis that has occurred over the last few decades from an understanding of education as something done to you when young, to a sense that education is the responsibility of anyone who takes seriously the need to ... learn and grow ... [throughout] life, professionally and personally.”\textsuperscript{477}

To be clear, the 1972 report did not designate a particular “learning theory” but rather “provided a platform to relate existing learning theory to new conditions” as well as pushed both socially and culturally for new learning theories that went beyond traditional, formal schooling and

\textsuperscript{469} Cf. Spring, 2009, 79ff.  
\textsuperscript{471} Faure et al, 1972, xxi.  
\textsuperscript{472} Faure et al, 1972, xxi.  
\textsuperscript{473} Illeris, 2018, 90.  
\textsuperscript{474} Illeris, 2018, 90.  
\textsuperscript{475} Spring, 2009, 79.  
\textsuperscript{476} Spring, 2009, 80.  
\textsuperscript{477} Ward, 2005, 1 (italics added).
Thus, new learning approaches did develop whereby researchers studied how learning and education affect social change to produce a thriving future. One such approach predicated, at least in part on Knowles’s earlier work, was lifelong learning which eventually moved to the forefront of conceptions in learning theory found in contemporary literature.

**Controversies**

Before moving on, I mentioned previously that UNESCO’s report from 1972 was controversial and I wish to say a bit more about that controversy here. Some scholars, like Spring, raise concerns that globalising education from UNESCO’s perspective is an attempt to develop a “world culture” and create their version of “a new man” whereby learning societies become not only self-sustaining but they also “wield democratic power and social cohesion” relative to economic growth.

Notions of lifelong learning are threaded throughout the report as a foundational principle to support the establishment of these sorts of learning societies. Spring notes that UNESCO’s Commission sees the world, both then and now, in ‘erratic progress towards a certain unity’ in which education plays a primary role.

Moreover, the Commission emphasised “moral and cultural dimensions of education ... [which begin with] self-understanding ... knowledge ... and the practice of self-criticism.” While such notions seem innocuous and perhaps useful on the surface, some geopolitical analysts worry that UNESCO has an underlying “agenda” to build some sort of world system. For example, Spring’s interpretation of the 1972 report gives the impression that UNESCO had malevolent intentions related to their global-education goals, including the use of the lifelong learning approach as part of their plan. Perhaps Spring and other researchers who raised these concerns have a point. However, I agree with political theorists who argue against these concerns about “world culture theories [in education or otherwise] since they underestimate the power dimension” of teachers and other local individuals who “resist and always transform the official models they are handed”.

In other words, a world organisation, like UNESCO might exert a certain power but ultimately, teachers and students across the globe are constantly “resisting, reshaping and

---

478 Illeris, 2018, 90.
480 Spring, 2009, 80 (italics added).
481 Spring 2009, 80.
482 Spring, 2009, 80.
483 Spring, 2009, 80-81.
484 Spring, 2009, 80-81.
485 Ekin Yildiran, “An Evaluation of Research on Globalization and Education” (Bielefeld, Germany: Bielefeld University, 2015), 10.
recreating” education and their unique “learning societies” to better suit themselves and not the proposed edicts of a dominating world culture.486

Lifelong Learning Theory — Terms & Concepts

As learning shifted in the West from “a passive activity”, or as only knowledge and skills that a person “received”, the lifelong learner approach meant that a person could encounter new experiences and other perspectives all of which had the power to “change” them.487 Lifelong learning is all about change - the two are inevitable and “go hand in glove”.488 The sorts of changes that lifelong learning enables a person to accomplish create “new capabilities”, opening doors to new and unexpected opportunities which means this approach to learning is adventurous if not perhaps a bit “risky”.489 The lifelong learning approach most always “upsets the status quo”, bringing with it “the potential to empower a person to influence the future, providing choices that would not be available otherwise”.490

In light of this concept of human change, Jarvis proposed a standard and recognisable definition of lifelong learning as “the combination of processes throughout a lifetime” which transforms the whole person in body and mind through their social experiences, which are then integrated into the person’s biography and personal life experiences, “resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person”.491 For Jarvis, the practice of lifelong learning has the ability to change a person “cognitively, emotively and practically”.492 The human mind is considered a person’s storage place for all their “knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, meaning-making (or what some scholars call, “semiosis”), beliefs and senses”.493 In this regard, Jarvis agrees with Lorenzo Charles Simpson when he wrote, “humanity is an unfinished project” always pushing forward to learn — to transform.494 Although these notions are not overly difficult to comprehend, Jarvis contends that the lifelong learning process is complex and rarely linear or straightforward

486 Yildiran, 2015, 11.
494 Jarvis and Watts, 2012, 1. Jarvis and Watts refer to Simpson’s The Unfinished Project: Toward a Postmetaphysical Humanism, (London: Routledge, 2001). Lorenzo C. Simpson’s work regarding humanity as the last “unfinished project” is controversial in the literature and beyond the scope for me to address further.
person-to-person. In other words, that lifelong learning comprehends the notion that humans are meant for learning and transformation across the span of their lives does not imply that all persons endeavour to be lifelong learners or to change in any of the ways that the lifelong learning theory boasts.

Scholars recognise that human change is first epistemological as a person comes to know “new information”. But the structure or “form” of knowing (denoted as acquiring in-formation) is but the potentiality for a transforming experience of learning for any given person. To acquire information does not automatically equate to human transformation. Rather, any form of knowing must undergo a sort of “re-forming” of what a person has come to know which denotes a transformation. Thus, there is a difference between a type of knowing that “has us” versus knowing wherein “we have it”. I elucidate the concept of transformation as it is understood in the field of learning theory with greater detail in a subsequent section since a person’s transformation is considered a significant and desirable outcome for those who practise lifelong learning.

One final dimension to mention is the “moral element”. Researchers assert that the lifelong learner is committed to their moral growth by participating through learning, as well as to the growth of others around them in their context. These sorts of commitments require a type of moral fibre or “character” which equates to “a mix of values, virtues and dispositions which normally guide conduct.” Virtue on this account is “that quality of character which enables a person to become [as Aristotle understood it] a ‘good example’ of what it means to be fully human”. Because of this, some scholars are calling lifelong learning “a moral virtue for the 21st century”.

As I have demonstrated above, over the last nearly four decades, learning theorists (i.e., Jarvis and Crick) have sought to bring the lifelong learning theory to the forefront of educational and communal life and practice in the West. However, for millennia in the East (i.e., in China), the concept of lifelong learning has been the touchstone for human educational and moral

---

498 Kegan, 2000, 51.
500 Kegan, 2000, 53.
501 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 360.
502 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 360.
503 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 360.
504 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 360.
505 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 359.
development. In the next section, I describe and then show how Eastern perceptions of lifelong learning have had an ever-increasing influence on Western thought, particularly related to viewing the practice of lifelong learning as a moral virtue. As previously mentioned, the notion of lifelong learning has been a part of Eastern culture for 2500 years or since the time of Confucius. However, it is not my intention to discuss in any depth Confucius, his story or his history, which includes the many schools of thought related to Confucianism.\(^506\) Instead, I aim to examine how lifelong learning, generally speaking, is conceived in Confucian thought, education, and in Chinese tradition.

**Lifelong Learning in the East**

In Eastern tradition, the act of learning necessitates a long-range life “goal” or a “life end”.\(^507\) This end is not to be delayed by daily anxiety over short-term ends, which easily become “the means to other short-term ends”.\(^508\) Throughout a lifetime, a person gradually becomes aware of their humanity to the point that they understand that “learning is a stepping-stone to the state of becoming fully human”.\(^509\) For a person to make progress towards their goal and life end – it takes constant work and moral fortitude which on a Confucian account of learning equates to “virtue” and character.\(^510\) In Chinese tradition, no person reaches their purpose to become fully human without this “core value of Confucian philosophy called ‘Ren’, translated as humanity, morality and righteousness – or the utmost virtue of the Universe”.\(^511\)

By attaining the moral virtue of Ren, the Chinese lifelong learner is enabled to make progress towards their life goal with the aid of a moral exemplar, the so-called Jun Zi who stands as the epitome of “outstanding knowledge, courage, and skills to access and practice humanity”.\(^512\) Jun Zi

---


\(^{507}\) Sun, 2012, 477.

\(^{508}\) Sun, 2012, 477.

\(^{509}\) Sun, 2012, 477.

\(^{510}\) Sun, 2012, 478.

\(^{511}\) Sun, 2012, 477 (italics added).

\(^{512}\) Sun, 2012, 477-478. Exemplarism has become a popular subject of contemporary research in the field of moral philosophy (in the West). See Linda Zagzebski’s work (2017) or, perhaps the lesser-known monograph of Rodney Needham, *Exemplars* (London: University of California Press, 1985). Needham asserts that there is an advantage to suspending reliance on traditional “procedures of argumentation” in the field of moral theory for instead a concentration on “examples presented by individuals” (xii). He argues that both moral instruction and moral qualities are evident through the study of “curiously impressive personages as exemplars” (xiii). Needham’s choice of exemplars are a-typical in that some are considered to be negative examples, such as Psalmanaazaar (an anthropologist) who wrote fraudulently about the people and geography of Formosa having never travelled or been there to see or observe them (cf. 75ff). Needham’s leading question for all of his case studies is, “What then does the case of [exemplar X] teach us ...” (113)?
exemplifies what it means to be “a self-directed and self-cultivated lifelong learner”. A person’s pursuit of Ren while seeking to follow the example of Jun Zi expands beyond the virtuous learner themselves because they also seek to “enlighten others” within their respective communities. To achieve this, the learner is engrossed in “a highly complex process” whereby they understand that learning is lifelong, also termed “lifewide” and can be downgraded to or bound up in a degree program or ultimately completed in a limited timeframe. Lifewide learning on this model is “holistic” which means that it affects a person’s life on the whole through various influential growing parts such as “the six Arts”, namely: sacred rites, music, archery, driving, the study of ancient writings, and maths. All six of these “arts”, when they are learned properly by practising Ren and following the example of Jun Zi during a lifetime, help to transform the lifelong learner according to their life goal of becoming “fully human”.

Lastly, intrinsic to Eastern lifelong learning are the ideas that a person will “study intensively, think pensively and practice earnestly”. On this account, the learner understands the importance of both doing and practising beyond the mere taking in of information or new knowledge. Confucius asserts that it is “pleasant to learn with perseverance and application”. In this regard, “application is the most meaningful function of what one has learned”. In Chinese tradition, it is useless for the lifelong learner to have the moral virtue of Ren while seeking tirelessly to emulate a moral exemplar without also “applying” all of what they have come to know to “life and work”.

I conclude this section underscoring two final points related to the sort of lifelong learning found in the East. First, Eastern lifelong learning is not necessarily attached to or correlated with any sort of political world order / culture, in contrast to Western lifelong learning as I have previously described that controversy. However, second, Eastern concepts of lifelong learning are similar to the type of lifelong learning theory described in contemporary literature found in the West. For example, Crick and Wilson argue that the practice of lifelong learning necessitates that a person has moral character, fortitude and virtue, which includes a desire for personal and corporate

514 Sun, 2012, 478.
515 Sun, 2012, 478.
516 Sun, 2012, 478.
517 Sun, 2012, 482.
518 Sun, 2012, 483-484.
519 Sun, 2012, 484.
520 Sun, 2012, 484.
521 Sun, 2012, 484.
522 Sun, 2012, 484.
transformation, leading a person towards becoming “fully human.” The fact that scholars deem the practice of lifelong learning to be morally virtuous is significant to my theory that lifelong learning provides an alternative way to conceive of Christian humility for today’s world.

Lifelong Learning — Correlated Theories

Transformational Learning

Contemporary learning theory is mostly unconcerned with past traditions of formal classroom pedagogical and andragogical education, which ostensibly doled out information with only sparse hints of what constitutes a transformational learning experience for students. Today, “transformative learning theory is the most comprehensive theory of ... learning developed to date.” Transformative learning theory has for decades relied on what scholars call “stage-based formulations” of change, or a linear process whereby a person moves along a trajectory through a series of progressive states towards some eventual good outcome—i.e., maturation or moral development. These models are drawn out foundationally from the research of, for one, psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and his “stage theory”. Piaget charted what he considered universal patterns of human development demonstrated in how children gain knowledge and moral insight over time. In light of this, for example, Kegan’s learning theory of “moral meaning-making” gives five rather complicated and confusing stages of development for the “evolving self”.

Moreover, Jack Mezirow offers ten stages in his transformative learning theory, which seeks

526 Stage-based formulations of development are prevalent across a range of disciplines in contemporary scholarship (i.e., psychology, education and religious studies). For example, psychologist James Fowler delineates six “stages of faith” in the realm of religious experience. Fowler’s stages of faith follow a pattern of human and psychological development, delineated as: stage one, intuitive-projection; stage two, mythical-literal faith; stage three, synthetic faith, stage four; individuated faith; stage five, conjunctive faith; ending with stage six, a universalising faith. Cf. Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). From examples like these, Kegan argues that the notion of transformation is so commonly assimilated across fields that “it risks losing its genuinely transformative potential!” (2000, 47).
528 It is beyond the scope to delve into Piaget’s theory of moral development, but it continues to have lingering effect on contemporary learning theory in the literature. See Transformative Learning Meets Bildung: An International Exchange eds. Anna Laros, Thomas Fuhr, and Edward W. Taylor (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2017). Bildung refers to the German notion of education and personal formation or self-cultivation (ix). For specific engagement with Piaget’s theory, refer to pages 162-177.
529 Kegan, 2000, 47ff.
to pinpoint the steps that guarantee “individual change”. Mezirow argues that learner-
transformation starts with a stage called, the “disorienting dilemma” which might be as simple as a
riddle or as complex as how to manage overwhelming conflict within a fixed and long-term
community. Mezirow’s conception of the dilemma or problem is followed by a series of non-linear
stages such as self-examination, critical reflection, exploration of options, plan(s) of action, trying
out new ideas and roles, concluding with “a reintegration” of this new perspective into their
personal biography. On this account, a person develops along these stages (perhaps out of order)
all at once or throughout their lifetime. Both Kegan’s and Mezirow’s transformative learning
theories remain influential in contemporary literature and align with the notions of self-direction
and participation which are intrinsic to the lifelong learning theory. In the section below, I
delineate some of the features, primarily from Mezirow’s model (also termed, “rational
transformation”), because of the cogent way it demonstrates the phenomenon of human
transformation, which is an integral part of the lifelong learning theory that I use to conceive of
Christian humility.

**Rational (Individual) Transformation**

Mezirow’s account of transformative learning entails a person reordering or reformulating
long-held internal assumptions or clusters of assumptions called, “taken-for-granted frames of
reference.” For Mezirow, these frames of reference are internally constructed (consciously and
unconsciously) as humans develop, helping them to interpret their life experiences from childhood
and throughout all of life with the aid of both their unique cultural and group norms. Frames of
reference, asserts Mezirow consist of “habits of mind” and “points of view”. Habits of the mind
are broad, generalised assumptions such as personal ideologies, religious doctrine, a person’s self-
concept or social norms that eventually go unchallenged. Points of view are immediate and

---

531 Mezirow, 2000, 22-23.
532 Mezirow, 2000, 22.
533 Mezirow, 2000, 21. Here, Mezirow discusses “incremental” or small changes as well as “epochal” or drastic changes that a person experiences over a lifetime.
536 Mezirow, 2000, 7 and Mezirow, 1991, 93.
537 Mezirow, 2000, 30.
538 Mezirow, 2000, 7.
specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes or judgments which determine how a person takes in the world to make meaning of experiences and of life overall.\textsuperscript{540}

These frames of reference represent and constitute a person’s most cherished beliefs and ideals about themselves, others and the world around them – in other words, their “meaning structures”.\textsuperscript{541} These assumptions, beliefs and ideals are what comprise who a person thinks they are, including their sense of individual and group identity.\textsuperscript{542} On a larger scale, these frames of reference will collectively or communally turn into “worldviews” such as “Christian belief in the Middle Ages” or the concept of logos in ancient Greece.\textsuperscript{543} Mezirow points out that humans tend to embrace, with relative ease, other frames of reference which complement and easily collate into the ones they already share, and by contrast struggle with those that do not align or correspond.\textsuperscript{544} On Mezirow’s account, a person is transformed beyond mere knowledge when they develop what he calls, new “dependable” sorts of frames of reference, which replace their outdated and less dependable ones.\textsuperscript{545} Mezirow defines a new or dependable frame of reference as that which helps a person to become ideologically inclusive, or open to other viewpoints and ideas, capable of integrating new experiences with a high degree of critical reflection related to the validity of or justification for tightly held assumptions.\textsuperscript{546}

Based on these terms, Mezirow contends that transformation takes place in a person in one of four ways. The first is when a person elaborates upon, expands or makes changes to their existing frames of reference.\textsuperscript{547} The second is when a person appropriates altogether new frames of reference to either replace or amend their older frames of reference.\textsuperscript{548} The third is when a person alters their point of view (i.e., a belief or a judgment), and lastly when a person alters habits of the

\textsuperscript{540}Mezirow, 2000, 17.
\textsuperscript{541}Mezirow, 2000, 16-7. Note that this view of human self-identity aligns with Dunnington’s work (cf. 2018, 34).
\textsuperscript{542}Mezirow, 2000, 18.
\textsuperscript{543}Mezirow, 2000, 17. Recent research has expanded Mezirow’s correlation of religious beliefs and a person’s habits of mind, frames of reference, points of view and norms – and how transformation occurs. See “Sustaining Collective Transformative Learning: Informal Learning And Revisions” by Olutoyin Mejiuni in Transformative Learning Meets Bildung: An International Exchange, eds. Anna Laros, Thomas Fuhr, and Edward W. Taylor (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2017), 202-216. Mejiuni analyses and seeks to give “coherent meaning” to the “collective transformative learning” (CTL) that occurred when African religious beliefs shifted to Christian beliefs among the people in the south of Nigeria – particularly from “a polygamous marriage system to a system that was overtly supportive of monogamy” (202).
\textsuperscript{544}Mezirow, 2000, 19.
\textsuperscript{545}Mezirow, 2000, 19.
\textsuperscript{546}Mezirow, 2000, 19.
\textsuperscript{547}Mezirow, 2000, 19.
\textsuperscript{548}Mezirow, 2000, 19.
mind (i.e., individual or group ideologies). Mezirow contends that human transformation in these terms can occur incrementally, suddenly, quietly or at times dramatically throughout a person’s life. On Mezirow’s account of rational, individual change in learning theory, it is paramount that a person learns to critique and evaluate (engage in “critical reflection”), in an ongoing way, their long-held personal assumptions, ideals, beliefs, and values with a view to maintain, augment or eradicate these—as a way to take on newer and dependable frames of reference. Mezirow concludes that transformation, as he construes it, is not easy for a person to achieve. For Mezirow, transformation of this nature involves a range of “complex institutional, interpersonal, and historical settings” within a person’s cultural context, which includes their ideologies that are often deeply embedded within a myriad of internal frames of reference.

Social (Corporate) Transformation & Biography
Underpinning a social or corporate transformation model of learning is the notion that individuals are “socially constructed” or “contextualized in the history, culture and social fabric of the society in which they live … at the intersection of their personal biography and societal structure”. However, the social approach shifts from the sole progress of a rational individual to the rational individual who now sits in the context of society – or in other words, the change that happens in society “in concert with individual change”. The essence of the social transformation theory which was put forth, in large part, by Brazilian philosopher and educator, Paulo Freire (1921-1997) outlines how the learner gains a so-called “ontological vocation” by seeing themselves as able to play a part in the “transformation in the world” so that the world becomes “an equitable place for

549 Mezirow, 2000, 22.
550 Mezirow, 2000, 19ff.
551 Mezirow, 2000, 23ff. Mezirow writes that “transformative learning may occur through objective or subjective reframing. Objective reframing involves critical reflection on the assumptions of others encountered in a narrative or in task-oriented problem solving, as in ‘action learning’” (23, italics added). Critical reflection is paramount for transformative learning theory and subsequently lifelong learning. See also, Jack Mezirow’s and Edward W. Taylor’s edited volume, Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace and Higher Education (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009). Mezirow and Taylor call upon scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including education, business, psychology, agronomy, and political science to explore individual and communal transformation, particularly related to the concept of “critical reflection”. Taylor writes, for example that when “students are seriously challenged to assess their value system and worldview”, they generally experience change (3). When a person’s “normative assumptions” are challenged through noncoercive discourse, “critical examination” becomes possible which creates the right environment for “transformative learning” (6).
552 Mezirow, 2000, 23.
553 Mezirow, 2000, 24.
555 Cranton & Taylor, 2012, 197.
all to live”. For this reason, social transformative learning occurs when the lifelong learner becomes aware of their own history and how that history is “embedded in social structures” which might both benefit and hinder the community in which they live.557

The notion of a person’s biography as it relates to lifelong or lifewide learning brings into sharp focus a learner’s “life history perspective” or their lived and conscious experiences also referred to as “the phenomenological concept of learning”.558 Biography, relative to learning or “biographicity”, means that a person accumulates and structures experiences from all realms of their life - individually, socially and institutionally - to form a congealed “new construct of meanings”.559 This approach involves a movement beyond “situative learning acts by isolated individuals” in their communal milieus – and instead looks at how a person is transformed by their experience, knowledge and actions in the context of their “life histories and life worlds” (i.e., the worlds of their family, work, inner beliefs, etc.).560

Biographical learning is concerned with the “societal ‘curriculum’” whereby a person’s “norms and expectations” are shaped from infancy into adulthood through human familial and institutional biases and a plethora of other structures. These norms are “constantly renegotiated and subject to historical change” according to a person’s “rules” of how they are building their biography – or how they wish to think about their own stories.561 Some scholars assert that societal “frameworks” built out from norms and expectations are strong forces in all human biography, which means that a person is unlikely to break free of them “entirely”.562 Thus, the participatory learner as part of their biographicity will “organise their experiences in such a way that they … generate personal coherence, identity, a meaning to their life history and a communicable, socially viable lifeworld perspective for guiding their actions”.563 In this regard, “biographical learning is about understanding changes in personal and social identity … as a potential for growth and

556 Cranton & Taylor, 2012, 197. What it means for a society, culture, and community to be “an equitable place for all to live” is perhaps unclear or idealistic. In today’s world, it seems that “equitable” can mean different things depending on a person’s preferred social, religious, political or cultural group and how these sorts of attachments and worldviews figure in to how a person identifies themselves. Thus, the danger is that an equitable place might only exist for one or two groups with overlapping purposes and the power to wield their positions.
ownership of one’s own life story”. The biographical learner, in the wider context of lifelong learning, is capable of redesigning “again and again, from scratch, the contours of [their] own life within the specific contexts in which [they] spend it, and in which [they] experience these contexts as ‘shapeable’ and designable” based on, for example newly emerging and more dependable frames of reference.

Summary

This concludes my introduction and survey of terms and concepts related to lifelong learning from contemporary literature. In summary, I described some of the events of the 1970s including key figures like Malcolm Knowles and Peter Jarvis leading to the rise of lifelong learning as a new approach to learning theory in the West. I unpacked lifelong learning conceived in the scholarship as a way of learning which fundamentally changes a person in both mind and body through their experiences. This means that lifelong learning touches a learner’s skills, emotions, values, ideals and beliefs, in essence transforming them holistically throughout their lifespan. I pointed out that lifelong learning is considered by some scholars to be morally virtuous, rendering it the new “virtue of the 21st century”.

In this regard, I discussed lifelong learning’s virtuous nature and millennia-long influence in the East, particularly in Chinese tradition. I explained how lifelong learning in this Eastern context gives a person their “life goal” which enables them to enter into a complex process of personal and communal growth, including the use of moral exemplars towards becoming “fully human”. From there, I gave further attention to the notions of transformation as they have come to be conceptualised in the West from the likes of Robert Kegan and Jack Mezirow who model change as a rational individual replacing or trading useless and perhaps outdated ideals and beliefs for newer, more dependable “frames of reference”. I included in this discussion other useful constructs in the lifelong learning approach such as social transformation, made possible when a person over the course of their life takes on an “ontological vocation”, seeing themselves as a way for change to happen in their societal milieu.

Lastly, I described how the notion of a person’s biography or personal history might reflect lifelong learning as they “again and again” reshape and renegotiate the contours of their own narrative within their unique social and historical context. All of this bears significance for the lifelong learning theory that I assert is a useful and life-affirming way to think about Christian

565 Christensen, 2012, 1.
humility today. But before moving on, considering these broader themes of lifelong learning that I have presented, some scholars in contemporary lifelong learning research have drawn out helpful traits and characteristics as a way to identify whether a person is a lifelong learner.

**Characteristics of a Lifelong Learner**

Before delineating the six identifying traits of a lifelong learner drawn from contemporary literature, I wish to clarify that foundational to each of these characteristics is the following: first, predicated on the previous terms and concepts I have presented above, I am asserting that a lifelong learner is to some extent morally virtuous. Second, I am assuming that a lifelong learner has entered into the complex process of human transformation within their social context. Lastly, there is no specific order or sequencing per se to the six identifying traits that I am describing in this section. However, I demonstrate that some of the qualities take precedence over the others, depending on the circumstances of the individual lifelong learner. The six identifying characteristics of a lifelong learner that I explain below are in three correlated pairs: (1) self-evaluation / openness to collaboration, (2) creativity / adaptability, and (3) personal efficacy / resiliency.

**Self-Evaluation & Openness to Collaboration**

A lifelong learner sees themselves as having “worth” because of human dignity which translates into their ability to see what is “of worth” in the world around them. Lifelong learners are aware of the attitudes that they have acquired throughout their lifespan – and can readily evaluate these and “the reasons for them” and either confirm them or reject them, taking “responsibility for them”. Self-awareness is a difficult and demanding process that takes conscious, continuous effort. In this regard, the learner knows themselves including (at times) their propensities towards “unwillingness” and “self-deception” as they pursue “what [they] understand to be best”. The lifelong learner is thus, “thoughtful, deliberate, contemplative” and is able “to take a good experience and make it a valuable experience”.

The lifelong learner is self-reflective and to a healthy extent self-critical, capable of stepping back, tackling challenges, analysing problems and giving thoughtful attention to the “big picture”

---

566 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 359. My use of concepts like human dignity and worth presuppose a Christian worldview that attaches worth to humans because they are created in the image of God, reflecting somehow his nature to the world. See Albert M. Wolter’s discussion in *Creation Regained, Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 22ff.

567 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 361.

568 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 361. Mezirow would support such a claim (2000, 24).

569 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 361.

and the overall future of an endeavour – offering useful “insight”. The lifelong learner knows that gaining self-awareness takes time, “tenacity” and “active engagement” which means they will “mentally [re]visit past situations” seeking to understand both their own actions and the actions of others. Self-aware learners accept that they have good ideas but that they also make mistakes and “don’t have all the answers”. Self-evaluation for a lifelong learner means that they will “learn from their successes and failures, discover what they should try to repeat and determine what they should change” for a better future for both themselves and those around them. Some scholars label this trait of self-awareness as “strategic awareness” because the lifelong learner “likes trying out different approaches ... to see what happens” and is capable of judging and repairing “their own emotional mood when they get frustrated or disappointed”, which means that they are not “robotic” or static but rather dynamic as they approach the obstacles for their future success.

In this regard, lifelong learners reflectively distance themselves “from the intense emotions” that entangle them in a particular event – looking for “perspective ... asking the question, ‘what is life trying to teach me?’” A self-aware / evaluative learner on this model is openly teachable, “digging deeper ... to see, hear and think about” what might be below the surface related to their personal issues and struggles, including those of others around them. Decisions for the self-critical lifelong learner “are met with thoughtful ... questions [which are] mulled over and evaluated” to ascertain the best way forward for themselves and their community. A self-aware person practises the skill of “active listening” which means that they “not only pay attention to words but also the feelings behind the words – reflecting feelings when necessary.” Because the lifelong learner is self-evaluative, they recognise and are open to the necessity of collaborating with others - highly respecting the learning and the “truth” that others can bring to them through collaboration. Good collaborators tend to be “flexible, good communicators and [empathetic]”.

Collaborative learners “are good at managing the balance between being sociable and being private

---

571 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 21-22.
572 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 22.
573 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 25.
574 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 22.
577 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 25.
578 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 25.
in their learning”. In other words, “they are not completely independent, nor are they dependent ... [but learn best as] they do so with and from others, ... sharing their difficulties, when it is appropriate.” Life-long learners tend to “acknowledge” and rely upon “other important people in their lives” who help them learn and who know more than they do. However, scholars are quick to add that collaborative lifelong learners are careful in choosing who these people are. Typically, collaboration “finds expression in particular relationships, where trust, affirmation and challenge are present and it is 'storied' in the trajectory a person brings to their learning and in their future hopes and aspirations”. The lifelong learner collaborates as they watch and emulate other people – turning to these “as resources, as partners and as sources of emotional support”.

Collaborative learners “also know that effective learning requires times of [personal] study and “dreaming on their own”. Thus, lifelong learners are not typically “stuck” in the trappings of “over-dependence” either on themselves or others – but rather seek a balance in their “learning relationships” which are built on “interconnections”. Learning relationships reflect the lifelong learner’s positive “interdependence” on both the past and the present, moving away from individualistic forms of isolation. Lifelong learners understand that “two minds with mutual interest” engaging in discourse can create “new meaning [and] new interpretation”, adding fresh layers of insight to earlier ideas. As learners “pull individual strengths together” they seek to accomplish a common goal.

Collaborative learners are capable of taking in the perspective of others, bringing an “interactive skill” to controversy that keeps them from perhaps being overly negative or “competitive”. In this regard, collaborative learners are naturally good at problem-solving – “learning how to bring out the best thinking in their [communities]” while also “placing what is best for the [community] before [themselves]” if necessary. Lifelong learners are those who “desire to find things out” which pushes them to learn as much as possible – “getting at the truth.” Thus,

582 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 138.
584 Crick, Broadfoot, and Claxton, 2004, 256.
586 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 365.
589 Crick, Broadfoot, and Claxton, 2004, 256. See also Crick & Wilson, 2005, 367.
590 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 366. See also Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 136.
591 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 133.
592 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 134.
593 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 135.
lifelong learners are active rather than passive which means they are not likely to accept what they are told uncritically, believing that “received wisdom” is necessarily always true. By contrast, the self-evaluative learner is “thoughtful” and spontaneously engaged in “active speculations and exploratory kinds of discussions”, open to all the possibilities. Collaboration to this extent takes a high level of emotional competency, which means that a person is generally in healthy [interdependent] relationships, making good decisions and exhibiting “prosocial behaviours” including critical thinking. In these ways, lifelong learners work towards “shared goals” which benefit all the members of a collaborative group, garnering respect for themselves and others in the process.

Creativity / Adaptability

The lifelong learner is “intellectually curious”, fascinated by new discoveries, excited by the prospects of what could lay ahead for them in an unknown but adventurous future world. Openness and perhaps collaboration will take the lifelong learner into often confusing situations which will necessitate that they “wrestle through” with the hopes of “self-growth”. Lifelong learners are never satisfied with what they know – oftentimes entering the process of adaptation even if it means “reinventing the wheel” because perhaps there is a better way, or a different use or something new to learn from the process itself. Because a lifelong learner might step into new and unchartered territory, they must at times be creative in their thinking for a way forward. Creativity underscores the lifelong learner’s penchant for “looking at things in different ways”. Creative learners “like playing with ideas and taking different perspectives, even when they don’t quite know where their trains of thought are leading.”

Creative learners will be “receptive to hunches and inklings that bubble up into their minds, making use of imagination, visual imagery and pictures …”. Creativity in a learner means that they might display a sort of “playfulness as well as purposeful, systematic thinking” all at once. Thus,

---

599 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 148.
600 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 111.
601 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 112.
602 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 131.
603 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 65.

98
creative learners are imaginative overall, open to changing and adapting what in the past would have been “clear-cut ... and tried-and-tested ways of looking at things”. Creative learners “follow many lines of thought” to generate “new and original solutions to problems” which carry great value for the future of the learning community in which they are a part. Creativity typically goes hand in hand with a learner’s ability to have “divergent thinking” which means that they “repeatedly break out of the ‘box’” of their history, adapting their personal ideals and possible limitations to experience “creative breakthroughs” which benefit themselves and others around them.

Some scholars consider creativity of paramount importance in today’s world because it means that a person is capable of finding “solutions to multidimensional problems, crossing boundaries such as conflict, poverty, ignorance, racial and gender inequity, hunger and apathy” in a constantly changing world. In this regard, creative learners are adaptable not out of a weak acquiescence but rather because they see all the possibilities which might shape the future. Creativity in this light means that a person will (as Mezirow would describe it) trade old ideals for new ones that are either better suited for the future or which make more sense given new and ever-changing information. On Mezirow’s account of transformative learning – this is what makes the difference. In other words, creative adaptability is what propels an individual and a group forward into lasting change rather than a stagnant status quo.

**Personal Efficacy / Resiliency**

*Personal efficacy* means that a lifelong learner is “optimistic of [their] capacity to cope with a given situation ... [with a] sense of personal power.” Not power that seeks to control others, but a power that believes that “actions and decisions have an effect on ... who they become” and on potentially favourable outcomes related to the future of their community. Efficacious learners are capable of “choosing their thoughts and actions, even in the face of the strongest hardship.” This does not mean it is easy, but lifelong learners are capable of pushing through frustrations and disappointments with productivity, inner strength and stability. Personal efficacy helps a learner

---

611 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 66.
612 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 66.
613 Mezirow, 2000, 19 and 22-23.
614 Mezirow, 2000, 23.
615 Cf. Mezirow, 2000, 23.
616 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 87.
617 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 87.
618 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 89.
619 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 89-90.
view setbacks as difficult, like anyone else, but also enables them to work at figuring out how to progress forward, generating success for themselves and others. Efficacious learners are also willing to be “vulnerable” while maintaining “a strong sense of focus in the face of pressures…” 620

The lifelong learner understands that life might and often does bring about confusing and harsh changes. With these not only is it acceptable to feel stuck, to struggle or to make mistakes, but the lifelong learner will make use of mistakes and struggles to help others in the future. 621 Moreover, the learner perseveres with resiliency through the challenges of maintaining an intact self-esteem because they understand their interdependence and the need to keep going. 622 Resiliency of this nature in the lifelong learner pushes them to overcome doubt, always looking towards their aspirations and life goals. 623 Such resilience means that the lifelong learner is rarely passive and instead “active” with a type of “robustness” which means that they accept learning as sometimes hard while remaining stalwart in overcoming the difficulties and entering the necessary processes that go with them. 624 Thus, the lifelong learner has “a high level of `stickability' and is able to `hang in' with learning even though they may, for a while, feel somewhat confused or even anxious about it”. 625

Lifelong Learners & Christian Humility

The lifelong learner, with these six identifying traits above, shows “moral virtue and good character” as they operate with sometimes difficult but valuable self-awareness which understands collaboration and the interconnectedness with others as more than vital for a flourishing future. 626 These learners are active and effective agents in their world with the capacity to push through difficulties and challenges to transform themselves and to see change in others. 627 In this regard, the lifelong learner “brings apparently disparate experiences together speculatively, to be critically curious, to be creative in one’s approach to these experiences,” and to grasp towards a whole understanding – with an appreciation of both the personal and social context of the world in which they live. 628 All of this gives rise to the potentiality of the lifelong learner’s moral development and growth towards becoming fully human – i.e., in the sense that perhaps Aristotle speaks of related to

620 Pearse & Dunwoody, 2013, 90.
626 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 371.
627 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 371.
628 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 371.
the continuous pursuit of virtue for the moral life.  

Building on the thread and resonances that link learning and humility in, for example, ancient virtue study, the *Talmud*, and the thinking of Aquinas, my thesis is that lifelong learning and the lifelong learner, as I have thus presented them, provide a practical and life-affirming framework from which to conceive Christian humility. However, humility conceived in terms of lifelong learning does not imply that for a person to be considered humble they must exemplify all of these qualities to perfection. On the contrary, lifelong learning and learners of this sort look different person-to-person based on their uniqueness as humans, their culture, context, their natural abilities and talents. For example, a person who does not see themselves as necessarily creative need not feel deficient or incapable of humility on this model. The ways in which one person expresses creativity related to solving problems or finding out-of-the-box solutions could and perhaps should look quite different than another person’s solutions and ways of thinking.

To show how the lifelong learning theory works in relation to depicting an alternative view of Christian humility that is not self-abasing but life affirming, I turn in the next three chapters to analyse the humility of the medieval saint, Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226). In chapter five, I start by providing Francis’s historical background and context in the high Middle Ages in western Europe. Then, in chapter six, I recount Francis’s biography in detail from a notable primary text before evaluating and reconsidering Francis’s controversial case of Christian humility in chapter seven by using the concepts and traits of the lifelong learning theory. I hope to demonstrate that Francis’s problematic episodes and practices that seem to disqualify him and make him a bad example of Christian humility, when reinterpreted in terms of the lifelong learning theory, point to another way to understand Francis, which shows him to be a good and favourable example, with implications for today’s church leadership.

---

629 Crick & Wilson, 2005, 371.
630 I recommend for future research that the lifelong learning theory, used as an alternative way to conceive of Christian humility, be tested against the biblical text or applied in the field of biblical studies, particularly when it comes to the New Testament, both in relation to the person of Christ as “the way of humility”, and to the writings of Paul in, for example, Philippians 2:5-11. My theory is that humility, when conceived in terms of lifelong learning, is exegetically substantiated in the biblical narrative.
Chapter 5: Francis of Assisi’s Historical Context

So far, I have examined the changing perceptions of the moral virtue of Christian humility, starting in pre-modernity and ending with the various ways that scholars have attempted to model it in today’s literature. As part of this discussion, I showed how influential philosophers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like Hume, Kant and Nietzsche, critiqued and rejected self-abasing forms of Christian humility, labelling such practices and behaviours as unnecessary, dangerous and contrary to human flourishing. Then, I delineated two approaches whereby scholars, in contemporary literature, seek to address these lingering modern critiques of Christian humility. In reference to the first approach, scholars downplay or disregard the critiques in favour of bringing back past theories of Christian humility in order to reintroduce them to the modern world and to the church. In the second approach, scholars take the modern critiques seriously by attempting to provide new ways of thinking about Christian humility. However, I argued that these examples, in both approaches, fail to appease the critiques in one way or another. For this reason and based on some historical precedent, I show in my thesis that an alternative way to model Christian humility is by using concepts drawn from the lifelong learning theory and the traits of the lifelong learner, all of which I elucidated in the previous chapter. Now, to demonstrate how the lifelong learning theory works as an alternative way to conceive of Christian humility, I turn to examine, over the next three chapters, the humility of the well-known medieval saint, Francis of Assisi.

In this current chapter, I provide relevant parts of Francis’s historical context during the high Middle Ages (1000-1300) in western Europe. Then I examine Francis’s example of Christian humility in relation to my theory about lifelong learning. In chapter six, I recount Francis’s biography using a primary text called, the Vita Prima (or First Life, published in 1229 and written by Thomas of Celano) along with secondary scholarship. On the basis of these introductory chapters, I turn in chapter seven to examine Francis and his example of Christian humility. To this end I analyse some of the debated episodes and controversial case studies that, taken together, seem to disqualify Francis as a good and life-affirming example of humility. However, here is where I intervene by appealing to the lifelong learning theory as a lens through which to reinterpret and reconsider Francis’s practices and behaviours, concluding that he is a worthy and positive example of Christian humility.

The High Middle Ages

The high Middle Ages, around and just before the life of Francis, represent a “stormy and tense epoch”, which includes monumental changes that affected Europe and the western Church.⁶³¹

⁶³¹ Manselli, 1988, 1.
In this chapter, I discuss some of these events and the interrelated historical shifts, which provide useful background to Francis’s biography, the humility he practised and the order that he started in the early part of the thirteenth century. Some of these changes during the high Middle Ages include a significant population increase, a budding middle class of merchants or travelling traders, and the establishment of cities. From here, I focus on the impact that these socio-economic shifts had on the church in Francis’s day, which was already struggling to keep up and stay relevant amid costly and mostly unsuccessful foreign crusades (or holy wars). Each of these factors contributed to increased spiritual lethargy and materialism among both church members and the clergy of the time. In this regard, I present ways that a few heretical sects (or organised groups) outside the church sought to enact reform. Then, I delineate some of the rulings that were enacted by the Lateran IV Council in 1215, which have direct relevance to Francis’s story and his order in the later years leading up to his death in 1226. All of this provides support and plausibility as to how and why Francis became successful in the almost unprecedented way that he did in the early thirteenth century in western Europe.

**Socio-Economic Changes**

While historians contest the different changes that occurred during the high Middle Ages, “demographic expansion” is rarely at issue because “there is no doubt it happened”. Although the scale of the increase is impossible to track, there is reason to believe that the growth started “around the tenth century”, peaking between 1150 and 1300. Estimates are that England, for example, grew from 1.5 million to 4.5 million with Europe’s overall size doubling or perhaps tripling to 73.5 million citizens by 1340. Some of the greatest increases were in France and the “Low Countries”, like Belgium and the Netherlands, followed by Germany and Italy. Due to increases such as these, the abject poor or peasant class came to represent the majority – at least 90 per cent of Europe’s population. For the peasantry, life during this era was ultimately about survival. With many more “mouths to feed”, historians discuss at least two ways in which the peasantry reacted to and survived the population explosion of the Middle Ages - first, by clearing land on which to produce food and second, by selling their skills and services in exchange for food.

---

633 Wickham, 2016, 123.
635 Nicholas, 2006, 57.
637 Wickham, 2016, 124. See also, Nicholas, 2006, 62.
Those among the peasantry who did not directly participate in land-clearing sold their skills and services for their food and livelihood. For example, some of these craftworkers, who “played an important part in villages”, were elite, full-time artisans with their own workshops, such as “blacksmiths and glassworkers” or small-scale pottery and tile makers. Like with agricultural produce, these artisans sold their wares in town markets (eventually village to village), which allowed them to become part of a class of “affluent peasants”, creating a social strata within the peasantry that had previously never existed. For these reasons and others, a peasant’s way of life seemed to be inching towards “general growth and prosperity” with sure signs of social mobility within their own ranks. Historians contend that during this time the peasant class greatly improved their way of life, evidenced by “relatively standardized metalwork such as knives”, better-quality houses and dwellings (i.e., from stones found all over Italy rather than wood), and eventually “good-quality jugs and bowls” and “cloth”. In other words, being once identified as a “peasant” no longer meant a “fixed” social station with little hope of change or economic advancement. Due to the increase in population in western Europe and the ensuing effects this had on the daily life and social mobility of the peasantry, soon new townships were created, which led to urbanisation (or the growth of cities).

New Towns & Cities

Historians debate the extent to which urbanisation - or “urban dominance” - played a role in the economic advances of the high Middle Ages. For example, Wickham asserts that only about “10 per cent of the population lived in towns” or cities in Europe, such as the largest ones, Paris, Milan and Flanders (northern Belgium), or smaller-but-growing cities of the day like London, Venice and Florence. Thus, Wickham argues that because most people lived in townships and rural communities, the “economic boom” of the period was mostly confined to these places with “small-scale exchanges of primary products and low-quality cloth and iron-work.” However, other historians, like David Nicholas, contend that by the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, “the urban economy became more diverse, jobs were available for peasants” and specialised goods were exported outside the smaller regions into “a demand market” for luxury items (i.e., cloth and spices)

---

638 Aurell, 2006, 41.
639 Aurell, 2006, 41.
641 Aurell, 2006, 41.
642 Aurell, 2006, 41. See also, Wickham, 2016, 125.
643 Wickham, 2016, 130.
644 Wickham, 2016, 130.
645 Wickham, 2016, 128-129.
in cities. Moreover, writes Nicholas, after 1180, “more farmers were producing goods with a view towards sale on the urban market ...” than ever before.

Regardless of the scale to which it happened, the transition of small-town exchanges and local village markets to urban centres meant that eventually another system of payment was needed to replace the old-rural way of bartering. As a result of the increase of mining in gold and silver “bullion”, new European “coinages” were introduced into the market which became the chief and “normal” method of payment for all transactions from the rural countryside to international trade fairs. Coin usage signalled “the critical transition to the urban manufacture of fine items that became the basis of the cities’ export trades as they gained access ... to more distant sources of industrial raw materials”. For example, “clothmaking became ... highly specialised” to the point that “luxury woolens [required] the work of as many as twenty separate artisans”. Due to such a “growing demand for silk”, soon occupational guilds (or associations of craftworkers) formed. Through these guilds “a genuine merchant class established itself in the great maritime cities of northern Italy” (i.e., Venice and Genoa), eventually spreading throughout western Europe.

A New Merchant Class & Growing Materialism

This new and influential merchant class gave Europe an even greater “sense of movement” than before in a variety of ways that had once seemed impossible. Now with “Flemings in England, Italians in Flanders, the French in Italy” and all because of mercantile trade – new vistas in “education or political career paths” put “social mobility [for all classes] ... on the rise”. Life in villages to towns to cities became progressively differentiated with some “lucky ones ... even if mostly rural élites” managing to navigate and prosper in the new world of a “commercial and economic revolution”. International guilds comprised of predominately cloth merchants eventually traded in all types of commodities, including grain, iron-working materials, and building materials. Flanders and north-west France were considered the “virtual industrial zones” for

---

646 Nicholas, 2006. 66.
647 Nicholas, 2006, 66. It is beyond the scope to enter these debates about the growth and impact of cities in the high Middle Ages on the economic prosperity of western Europe.
648 Nicholas, 2006, 70.
649 Nicholas, 2006, 70. See also Wickham, 2016, 128-129.
650 Nicholas, 2006, 75.
651 Nicholas, 2006, 75.
652 Aurell, 2006, 44.
653 Aurell, 2006, 44.
654 Aurell, 2006, 44.
655 Wickham, 2016, 139.
656 Wickham, 2016, 139. See also Malcolm Barber, The Two Cities: Medieval Europe, 1050-1320 (London: Routledge, 1993), 61.
657 Nicholas, 2006, 77.
labour-intensive manufacturing of fine woollens, with the finest being Flemish.\footnote{Nicholas, 2006, 77.} However, it was the “Italian cities [that] bought ‘undressed’ northern cloth at the fairs and finished it, then sold it in the Levant (or the eastern Mediterranean) and Africa”\footnote{Nicholas, 2006, 76.}

“The geography made Italy the commercial [mercantile] outpost of Europe, linking it with the luxury-producing Byzantine (now Istanbul Turkey) and Islamic economies”.\footnote{Nicholas, 2006, 80.} Mercantile trade in the period was remarkable because it moved beyond the confines of the old Roman world into places like the eastern Mediterranean (i.e., Candia and Cyprus).\footnote{Nicholas, 2006, 80.} Traders in the central Mediterranean like in Naples and Pisa (in Italy), with contacts in the East, brought forth “Levantine products such as spices and silks … timber, iron and cloth” to other ports of sea.\footnote{Barber, 1993, 61.} Because of this, Italy as the commercial outpost gained ease of passage to western ports like Marseilles, France or Barcelona, Spain which also had their own fair share of luxury items such as, “fur, silks, woollen cloth, alum, arms, glassware … [and] paintings and ivories”.\footnote{Nicholas, 2006, 80.}

The merchant’s local and international goals were predominately “concerned to gain for themselves certain basic privileges which would give them the opportunity to develop their trading activities beyond the rudimentary stage”.\footnote{Barber, 1993, 49.} Merchants “achieved a high degree of independence in Italy and Imperial Flanders”, which meant that they typically had “political control of the towns” – control at one time delegated to local bishops (or senior members of the church).\footnote{Barber, 1993, 50.} The result was that most towns of the day had ever-growing groups of merchants with the same economic and political ideals, who bonded together and overthrew bishops perhaps “after a fierce struggle”.\footnote{Barber, 1993, 50.}

Thus, townships often reflected the economic aims of these mercantile factions with little to no restrictions set upon them by the church.\footnote{Barber, 1993, 50.} By the thirteenth century, merchants “tended to abandon a travelling lifestyle in favour of a sedentary one”, directing the family company from local offices where they had economic and political control.\footnote{Aurell, 2006, 44.} Merchant families of stature and influence

\footnote{Nicholas, 2006, 80. Cf. Barber, 1993, 61 and Paolo Delogu, An Introduction to Medieval History, trans. Matthew Moran (London: Duckworth Publishing, 2002). Delogu provides an examination of material growth such as this in medieval history from a distinctively Italian perspective.}
freely exhibited their “vanity” by building up their reputations as low-level benefactors in their towns of origin, helping to make these towns “grander” for social recognition and status.669

This previous description of the merchant family, with its status and prestige, characteristic lifestyle of exotic travel, and local governmental power and control, has direct relevance to understanding parts of Francis’s biography which will become evident in the next chapter because he was the son of a merchant. For this reason, Francis had access to economic and educational opportunities, which gave him a high status and prestige in his hometown of Assisi. As I recount it in chapter six, Francis, as a young man, had access to the family’s business and all its luxury items, like exotic cloth and silver coins to spend on himself and his friends. To some extent, the rise of the merchant class, bringing with it an overall increase in materialism, represented the culmination of all the socio-economic changes that had been taking place up until that point, marking the beginning of a new age during the high Middle Ages.670

The Rise & Influence of Universities

Part of these new beginnings was the establishment of universities. Traditionally, education was kept simple and local to cathedral schools, which were first organised to train the parish choir and the diocesan clergy for their daily tasks and regular liturgical activities.671 However, because of the growing need for better-trained priests, the papacy encouraged better, local education and good “teaching”, which attracted candidates for the local priesthood, but also others who wished to learn for the sake of learning and not only as a way to serve the church.672 Moreover, because of an influx of new “knowledge”, which had come to the West in the form of ancient Greek texts from Aristotle and Plato, there was an increased need for some sort of educational institution to help students learn beyond what the cathedral school model taught and could accommodate.673

Much like trader guilds in the economic world, groups of “extraneous pupils” and their teaching “masters” formed academic guilds,674 and these began populating local townships.675 In

---

670 Barber, 1993, 79.
675 Abulafia, 2004, 35.
In many cases, these academic guilds turned into universities or institutionalised communes of masters and students engaging in professional *studia* or studies, which used varying teaching methods from a range of disciplines, such as Philosophy, Theology, Art and Medicine.\(^{676}\) Officially, one of the first of its kind was the University of Paris (1150), launched out of the local cathedral school at Notre Dame.\(^ {677}\) The transformation of these guilds and some cathedral schools into structured and eventual united institutions was paralleled by the successful integration of the methods and materials of a new scholasticism.\(^ {678}\)

The contribution of this emerging university system, and the class of “schoolmen” or scholastics who studied in them, was to foster “a passion to examine creatively what they had inherited from the past [i.e., in theology] and to reorganise it” for the future.\(^ {679}\) Scholastics such as these harnessed the “tools of the *trivium*” (or Aristotelian notions of rhetoric, grammar, and logic) as a method through which to analyse all the available sources on a topic and not solely as they were understood from the perspective of the Bible and church traditions.\(^ {680}\) This intellectual renaissance paved the way for students who wanted to learn all that there was to learn by debating “new and exciting questions” regarding their Christian worldview – as a way to discern contradictions, and then to solve them using “careful textual analysis of their contrasting sources”.\(^ {681}\)

The University of Paris represented “the northern archetype for medieval university development” and was widely supported in its endeavours by both “secular and ecclesiastical authorities”.\(^ {682}\) However, as Barber puts it, “the application of Aristotelian logic and philosophy ... to matters of faith produced sharply differing reactions”.\(^ {683}\) Franciscans, such as Alexander of Hales (1185-1245) and later Bonaventure (1221-1274) were “prepared to use Aristotelian construction essentially as an adjunct to the faith” and not as a foundational philosophy to be espoused to “the detriment of Christian teaching”.\(^ {684}\) Dominican intellectual and regent master of theology at the University of Paris (1256-1259), Thomas Aquinas (introduced in chapter one), would come to offer a sophisticated “middle way ... building a logically ordered hierarchy of knowledge within a Christian

---

\(^{676}\) Abulafia, 2004, 20ff. See also, Barber, 1993, 409.


\(^{678}\) Barber, 1993, 453.

\(^{679}\) Abulafia, 2006, 153.

\(^{680}\) Abulafia, 2006, 153 (italics added).

\(^{681}\) Abulafia, 2006, 153.

\(^{682}\) Barber, 1993, 409.

\(^{683}\) Barber, 1993, 410.

\(^{684}\) Barber, 1993, 410.
Because of these shifts and advances in education and theological training, local parish priests fell behind and found it difficult to keep up with the trends, which only served to detract from their already waning effectiveness, reputation and appeal for growing numbers of people, who were enamoured with a new-found materialism, the increasing intellectual climate of the day and the opportunity to learn outside of the church context.

**The Fracturing Church: Popular Religious Movements**

By the thirteenth century, many dioceses had hundreds of parishes, for example, 363 in Paris by the mid-1200s and 1,349 in Norwich, north of London. Numbers like these made it virtually impossible for bishops, “even in smaller dioceses to have close contact with parish priests” or the laity for that matter. Thus, to discipline, consult with and advise their many parish clergy for whom they were responsible, “bishops issued detailed legislation ... in the form of diocesan statutes, covering all aspects of behaviour ... supervision of their parishioners, and the upkeep of their cathedral churches”. However, without this informal but close contact of bishops with their cathedral priests and dioceses, standards inevitably dropped, or at least the range of clergy serving the many and now splintered parishes varied on all fronts, not least of which were their failing moral and spiritual example and fortitude for their congregations. These falling moral and spiritual standards among clergy meant an ever-widening fracture or disenchantment and increasing disharmony between parishioners and their local cathedral priests. Added to these tensions, the church magisterium also mandated a heavy ten per cent tithe (or tax) of all produce from its members, which did not sit well with parishioners where priests were considered both inept and morally suspect.

Some medieval historians, like Richard Southern, contend that this growing sense of division,

---

685 Barber, 1993, 410. See also, Jacques Verger’s discussion of “The Universities” in The New Cambridge Medieval History VI, ed. Michael Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 66-81, DOI:10.1017/CHOL9780521362900.005, Accessed 8 June 2021. Verger argues that “although there were still relatively few universities in western Europe in the fourteenth century, they occupied an unchallenged and powerful position in the development and diffusion of learning. The major centres of the university network remained the oldest universities, which had been founded at the beginning of the thirteenth century at Bologna, Paris and Oxford. Their prestige was unrivalled, and they attracted the largest numbers of students. They were both bench-marks for teaching standards and models for the institutional framework of newer foundations” (66).


687 Barrow, 2006, 131.

688 Barrow, 2006, 133.


690 Barrow, 2006, 135.

691 Barber, 1993, 163.
distance and tension between the church at Rome, local clergy and the laity had been years in the
making. He writes that by the eleventh century, “the Church [had become] a spiritual hierarchy,
culminating in the Pope ... and between the clergy and the laity, there was a great gulf fixed”
because now the lowest clerk was considered superior to the greatest laymen. The consequences
of this hierarchy were “secular as well as spiritual” in that the clergy now belonged to a “privileged
order”, set apart and “immune from secular judgment”. This elite status enjoyed by the papacy
and clergy included privileges, such as owning “lands and possessions [that were to be] set apart
from the world” which put an ever-expanding material and social wedge between the entitled,
“Papal Government of the Church” and the faithful. Southern argues that the general “mood” of
the culture reflected a “cutting off of the Church from the lay world” altogether – a separation that
was felt in all realms across medieval life. In this regard, no longer was Rome considered a city of
“spiritual power”, pilgrimage, or a sacred place “to pray at the tomb of St. Peter”. Instead, it had
become “the centre of the everyday government”, a city where people travelled to conduct “difficult
business” and attend “Papal court”.

Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, “anti-clerical campaigns” and small to large-scale
unsanctioned religious reform movements emerged, some raised by priests themselves, who
described churches as “brothels and the sacraments as pollutions” in an effort to encourage local
congregants not to pay tithes to such ruinous establishments. Although many local priests
maintained their functions for their members (i.e., baptisms and funerals), lay people were
increasingly disgruntled by the corruption and control of Rome, blatant immorality, poor preaching
and teaching including the dispassionate care and overall pastoral ministry of their clergy.

---

693 Southern, 1953, 131.
694 Southern, 1953, 131.
695 Southern, 1953, 131.
696 Southern, 1953, 131.
697 Southern, 1953, 135-136.
698 Southern, 1953, 136. There is a distinction between what transpired in Rome and how the actions of the
papacy affected and trickled down into local parishes. However, my aim here is to underscore the growing
tensions and the general distrust that was engendered by church officials in the eyes of the laity at the time.
699 Barber, 1993, 163. The most famous of these early anti-clergy agitators was Arnold of Brescia (1090-1155)
who was from a family of nobility and was therefore, educated and preached (c. 1119) “on the need for a
return to the poverty of the Apostles” (Barber, 1993, 164). It is also important to note that not all of these
movements were deemed heretical, however, eventually they each, in their own way, caused confusion, fear
and dissent for the church and its clerics (Barber, 1993, 163). Cf. *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe*,
700 Barrow, 2006, 135. The religious movements which arose during the period and the figures who led them
and called out for reforms are numerous. My only aim here is to show that the times were charged with
religious and political activism the likes of which were almost unprecedented. Barber asserts, like Southern,
that the main theme was “a corrupt Church and clergy” (164). He highlights key leaders (self-appointed) such
Restrictive papal territorialisation (i.e., defining borders) became a deterrent to proper pastoral activity, limiting ministerial effectiveness. For a time, monasteries were called upon to fill pastoral gaps for ailing churches, providing better preaching and more informed teaching to the laity than the priests, but these efforts were not enough to quell dissension and appease concerns among lay people of the day.

The “anti-clergy agitators” and the groups that formed out of these, notably the Cathars and the Waldensians, only grew in popularity as time went on, and their proponents publicly preached and debated about materialism, corruption and spirituality, which undermined “the old order” of things for the Holy See. These religious groups were attractive to the general populace because, in contrast to the “wealth and power of the bishops, canons, and abbots”, the Cathars, for example, also called the “perfect ones”, were gaunt from fasting, chaste, and “capable of spreading rich ideas” that fascinated the faithful who were “thirsty for the divine” or a word of comfort in the midst of their poverty and suffering. Similarly, the Waldensians, started by “Peter Waldo (also called Valdès), a rich married merchant … struck by the reading of the gospel” chose to leave his “life of sin” which was generally equated with the status and prestige of the mercantile lifestyle and activities. Waldo’s conversion “made an impression” on people and helped to spread a “lively and intense religiosity”, summarised as “the demand for the fullest and most complete adherence to the counsels of Jesus in the gospel” (i.e., poverty and purity).

Although there are complicated social, ecclesiastical and theological issues at play which I cannot discuss fully, foundationally, both the Cathars and the Waldensians (perhaps at first) hoped “to return to a life of apostolic poverty” and “a return to an age of simplicity” especially in the face of ostentatious materialism in all its forms upheld by churchmen and including the papacy in

---

as Belgian preacher, Tanchelm of Antwerp (d. 1115), Henry the Monk (in Lausanne, 1030-1148), and Peter of Bruys (in the French Alps, 1117-1131) who each started their own religious movements but also contributed to the wider religious “disturbances” of the period (163-164).


For example, Manselli discusses the role and leadership of Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercians during these troubled times for the church – battling cultural materialism, new intellectualism and rising heresy (1988, 1-3). Eventually, Bernard would give more of his attention to the crusades.

Barber, 1993, 165. For further background on the Cathars and Waldensians, see Manselli’s discussion, which is both brief and helpful, wherein he describes these religious groups of the times in relation to their effect on and relevance to Francis and the order he founded (1988, 6-12). See also, Barber, 1993, 163-171. There were other religious movements during the period, “like those of the Henricians and the Petrobrusians … [which] seemed dangerous while they lasted, but within a relatively short amount of time they had burnt themselves out” (Barber, 165).

Manselli, 1988, 4.

Manselli, 1988, 9. See also, Barber, 1993, 143.

Manselli, 1988, 9.
Rome. Eventually, the Cathars were labelled “heretical” for numerous reasons, which went beyond an overall “resentment of the clergy”, primarily stemming from their “set of alternative Christian beliefs” related to, for example, their rejection of the sacraments or need for the Eucharist. These sorts of propagated views, coupled with growing distrust of the papacy, meant that a large number of lay people stopped regularly attending their local church mass or showing up for annual confession. With tensions continuing to run high due to these popular and unsanctioned religious movements, perhaps the greatest stride towards reforming and repairing the fracturing church of the high Middle Ages came in April 1213 when Pope Innocent III called the Lateran IV Council. As will become apparent in later chapters, this Council and its decisions came to have a significant and controversial impact on Francis and the Franciscans, including the various religious movements, as well as the Dominicans.

Reform & The Lateran IV Council

The Lateran IV assembly that finally convened in 1215 became “the greatest ecclesiastical gathering of the century”, significantly affecting church doctrine and practice. The Council was attended by over four hundred bishops, eight hundred priests and representative princes from all over Europe. The goals of Lateran IV were clear, “the conversion to the Catholic faith of a large and disaffected group of Christians”, influenced by the outside groups like the Cathars and Waldensians, including instructional protection for and support to the faithful. Part of “the papal reform movement”, including those Councils previous to Lateran IV, pushed for the church to

707 Barber, 165.
708 Barber, 165. Barber highlights the fact that while the Waldensians had “the widest spread appeal” that ultimately it was the Cathars who became the greater credible threat and a “terrible challenge” for the church magisterium for many reasons but specifically because they “believed in mitigated dualism” in seeking to answer, “the fundamental religious and philosophical problem of the existence of evil”. For the Cathars, two principles existed, “Light or the good God of the Spirit and that of Darkness or the evil God of material things” (168-169). Such teachings were “far reaching” in the problems they caused (169). For example, dualism of this nature meant that “Jesus Christ could not have taken human form” because the material world is evil (169). Barber discusses the complexities of this time in that once corruption is equated or hinted at within the church and its clergy, little could stop the ensuing “dissent”, which include “a series of self-appointed leaders”, who each acted, in their own way as a deterrent to regular, ritualised religious life as it had once been practised (1993, 163ff).

712 Geary, 1989, 460.
713 Jordan, 2001, 204.
advance its Christian ideals “for the regeneration and purification of society” at any cost or by any means necessary, which only increased the appeal to enter into the crusades or holy wars.\textsuperscript{714}

The nine crusades waged to take back the “Holy Places” where Christ had lived, died and been resurrected, provided a deep and abiding undercurrent of misguided purpose and mission for those in the Western church, who wished for some sort of military glory.\textsuperscript{715} Relevant to this discussion and Francis is that despite the failures of, for example, the fourth crusade (1198), Pope Innocent III was a relentless proponent of military expeditions to the holy land.\textsuperscript{716} Pope Innocent III’s successor Pope Honorius III (1150-1227) carried on this fervour and convinced Andrew II of Hungary (1177-1235) and Leopold VI, Duke of Austria (1176-1230) to take up the cross and lead a fifth expedition (1217).\textsuperscript{717} However, they chose to start their campaign in Egypt against the sultan at the time, al-Kamil (c. 1177-1238).\textsuperscript{718}

By 1219, crusaders had managed to capture the port of Damietta and were offered all the holy cities in return for withdrawing from Egypt altogether.\textsuperscript{719} Perhaps encouraged by the success at Damietta, the crusaders refused this offer and their subsequent march into Cairo failed.\textsuperscript{720} In the end, the crusaders were forced to return home after an eight-year stalemate without capturing Egypt or the holy cities.\textsuperscript{721} It is in this fifth crusade that Francis makes an appearance after several attempts to get there in hopes of converting Sultan al-Kamil.\textsuperscript{722} The crusades, and the military glory (including martyrdom) attached to them, were a strong pull for Francis throughout his life, as I elucidate in his biography in the next chapter. But first, I present some of the salient decisions put forth by the Lateran IV Council, which also impact Francis and his order in the later years before his death.

\textbf{Clergy Reform}

Of the more than seventy canons (or rulings) proposed in Lateran IV, several call for the moral reform of clerics and clergy. For example, canon 14, “Against Incontinence” states “that the

\textsuperscript{714} Barber, 1993, 112. It is beyond the scope to delve further into the crusades, including the religious, political, economic and social factors that came to be associated with them. See Barber’s full discussion (1993, 112-130). Manselli’s recounting of the crusades is also useful because his focal point is Francis, whereby he draws in the cultural ideals related to martyrdom and military glory in his day that would come to affect and influence Francis deeply (1988, 217ff).

\textsuperscript{715} Barber, 1993, 112.
\textsuperscript{716} Barber, 1993, 123-124.
\textsuperscript{717} Barber, 1993, 124.
\textsuperscript{718} Barber, 1993, 124-125.
\textsuperscript{719} Barber, 1993, 125.
\textsuperscript{720} Barber, 1993, 125.
\textsuperscript{721} Barber, 1993, 125.
\textsuperscript{722} Manselli, 1988, 220-221.
morals and conduct of clerics may be reformed [as they] strive to live in a continent and chaste way ...

To this end, the canon delineates that clergy are to “beware of every vice involving lust, especially that on account of which the wrath of God came down from heaven upon the sons of disobedience, so that they may be worthy to minister in the sight of almighty God with a pure heart and an unsullied body”. Others, such as canon 15, warned against drunkenness and gluttony, ruling that “[i]f anyone shows himself worthy of blame in these matters, let him be suspended from his benefice or office ...”. Canon 16 stipulated the sort of dress and decorum required of all parish clergy members, i.e., “[t]heir outer garments should be closed and neither too short nor too long. Let them not indulge in red or green cloths, long sleeves or shoes with embroidery or pointed toes, or in bridles, saddles, breast-plates and spurs that are gilded or have other superfluous ornamentation”.

Lateran IV rulings also made it clear that clerics were not to marry. In this regard, canons 50-51 assert that “if any persons dare to marry contrary to this prohibition, they shall not be protected by length of years, since the passage of time does not diminish sin but increases it, and the longer that faults hold the unfortunate soul in bondage the graver they are”. Moreover, the council ruled that “we altogether forbid clandestine marriages [of priests] and we forbid any priest to presume to be present at such a marriage”. Such rulings confirmed both bishop and priestly duties and made it clear that “ideal priests” were to be sexually pure and sober. These chaste and morally astute priests were to look carefully over the souls put in their charge within their local congregations (including visiting the sick or infirmed). Canons such as these were meant to address the problems and disharmonies among the priesthood towards the laity, as previously described, calling for parish priests to resist being “over-occupied with secular matters” so that they

723 Norman P. Tanner has conducted comprehensive textual research on all church councils in multiple volumes. For example, see *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Nicaea I to Lateran V* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press, 1990). It is beyond the scope to enter into the various text critical debates surrounding the ecumenical councils and their rulings, including Lateran IV. All references to the *Lateran IV Council Canons* text (LIVCC) for this thesis are taken from Tanner’s edition (1990) found at: https://www.documentacatholicomnia.eu/03d/1215-1215._Concilium_Lateranum_IIII._Documenta_Omnia._EN.pdf, 1-23, Accessed 22 November 2020. References from here will be as follows: LIVCC, the specific canon#, followed by the page# of Tanner’s edition as it appears in the public domain copy of the text, cf. LIVCC.14, 9.

724 LIVCC.15, 9.
725 LIVCC.16, 9.
726 LIVCC.16, 9.
727 LIVCC.16, 9.
728 LIVCC.50, 17.
729 LIVCC.50, 17.
730 LIVCC.51, 17.
731 Jordan, 2001, 211.
732 LIVCC.21-22, 10.
might give attention to the faithful. In this regard, priests were to care for the cathedral church buildings by keeping them clean and taking care that the Eucharist be “kept under lock and key” and not left out “carelessly” – which carried a three-month suspension.

Lateran IV also allowed for independent preachers to help the bishops and local priests discharge all the duties necessary for a well-functioning and effective parish, such as preaching, teaching and general pastoral care, ruling “that bishops are to appoint suitable men to carry out with profit this duty of sacred preaching, men ... who will visit with care the peoples entrusted to them in place of the bishops, since these by themselves are unable to do it, and will build them up by word and example”. Moreover, the council forbade priests from continuing the practice of pronouncing or executing a sentence of death, or to act as “judge in extreme criminal cases”, which also ended “purification (or trial) by ordeal”. These trials had before tested a person’s innocence or guilt in criminal proceedings, based on whether they survived a painful or dangerous test. However, Lateran IV’s call for reform did not stop with the clergy but also prescribed changes necessary for the church laity of its day.

Lay Reform

Lateran IV outlined lay reform in canon 21 ruling that “all the faithful of either sex, after they have reached the age of discernment, should individually confess all their sins in a faithful manner to their own priest at least once a year.” Church members were exhorted to partake of “the sacrament of the Eucharist at least at Easter unless they think, for a good reason and on the advice of their own priest, that they should abstain from receiving it for a time”. Rulings such as these imply that overall church attendance and participation in the sacraments had dropped off during the period – and Lateran IV’s rulings were a way to call the faithful back to the church, which included their participation in all its liturgical activities. Furthermore, the council outlined ways for wayward, but repentant, laity to be “restored to the body of the elect” through a “right faith” and “works pleasing to God towards eternal salvation”. These rulings allowed for some members of outside groups, such as the Cathars and the Waldensians, to be reinstated and reconciled to the

733 Jordan, 2001, 211.
734 LIVC.20,10.
735 LIVC.10, 8.
736 LIVCC.18, 10.
737 LIVC.18, 10.
738 LIVCC.21, 10 (italics added).
739 LIVCC.21, 10.
740 LIVCC.21, 10.
741 Jordan, 2001, 211.
church. In this regard, there were canons against any unofficial sects, labelling them “heretics” along with their “protectors” (i.e., canons two and three), and mandating that they prove their innocence to the Roman Curia or be excommunicated. The Council was concerned that these outside groups were effectively drawing the faithful away from the church, and creating confusion among the laity.

Thus, for these reasons, religious orders were instructed in Lateran IV, canon 13:

Lest too great a variety of religious orders leads to grave confusion in God's church, we strictly forbid anyone henceforth to found a new religious order. Whoever wants to become a religious order should enter one of the already approved orders. Likewise, whoever wishes to found a new religious house should take the rule and institutes from already approved religious orders. We forbid, moreover, anyone to attempt to have a place as a monk in more than one monastery or an abbot to preside over more than one monastery.

Canon 13 affirmed that no new orders were allowed and that any currently sanctioned orders not devise new “rules”, but instead, take on already existing rules, such as Augustine’s or Benedict’s. After Lateran IV, Pope Innocent III fell ill and died in July 1216 without fulfilling some of his immediate plans to publicise and enact the rulings of the Council, which included his own clarifications and input. Innocent’s passing, and the implications of canon 13 regarding rules, and those existing orders without rules, had serious consequences for the new religious orders, including the popular religious movements of the day.

New Religious Orders

In 1206, Dominic (introduced in chapter one) and his local bishop, Diego, had been sent to Paris to help combat theological heresies taking root there in the wake of an emerging university system. These heresies and teachings were drawing the faithful away, due in part to the new university system and growing numbers with better education and theological training, but also because members of the outside sects, such as the Cathars were continuing to find new ways to attract the masses by wearing common clothing as opposed to the regal garments often worn by

---

742 LIVCC.3, 5. The canon begins, “we excommunicate and anathematize every heresy raising itself up against this holy, orthodox and catholic faith which we have expounded above. We condemn all heretics, whatever names they may go under. They have different faces indeed but their tails are tied together inasmuch as they are alike in their pride. Let those condemned be handed over to the secular authorities present, or to their bailiffs, for due punishment” (5).
743 LIVCC.3. 5. Regarding those who would protect the heretics, the council warns, “Catholics who take the cross and gird themselves up for the expulsion of heretics shall enjoy the same indulgence, and be strengthened by the same holy privilege, as is granted to those who go to the aid of the holy Land. Moreover, we determine to subject to excommunication believers who receive, defend or support heretics” (5).
744 LIVCC.13, 9 (italics added). See also, Geary, 1989, 467.
745 LIVCC.13, 9.
locals priests and the papacy.\textsuperscript{747} In response to these popular trends, Dominic adopted a different strategy, deciding “to appear in apostolic poverty ... with simple clothing, a modest demeanor, and no pompous retinue”.\textsuperscript{748} Thus, Dominic and his followers imitated the appearance of some of the local Cathars, with hopes that, through sound and orthodox preaching, they might find success in reaching those currently outside the church or drawn away from it by these popular, unsanctioned religious groups.\textsuperscript{749} By 1207, evidence of success came as Dominic established a monastery for converted women and “continued to advance ‘holy preaching’ based on learned engagement with the text of the Bible and the kind of dogmatic and instructional preaching that was allowed to him as a cleric.”\textsuperscript{750} The Dominicans’ goal was to establish a distinct combination of new ideals, which included holy preaching in word and deed, poverty aligned with the apostolic life, and concern for spiritual progress in the lives of church members.\textsuperscript{751}

Over the next six years, Pope Honorius III issued over forty bulls (referring to the lead seal, or bulla on official church documents), instructing great support to the ever-growing Dominican order, which meant that it had greater numbers and moved beyond the borders of their original starting place in Toulouse, France to “all of the lands of Christendom”.\textsuperscript{752} Anchor locations were naturally at the University of Paris (with a focus on Theology) and eventually at the University of Bologna (with a focus on Canon Law).\textsuperscript{753} The budding expansion of the Dominicans and their theological teaching “reached across France, the Iberian Peninsula, Italy, Germany, and Scandinavia.”\textsuperscript{754} The Dominicans, although sent by the Holy See to enact reform, avoided any system of normal affiliation with the church, organising instead according to their geographical divisions and adding the remaining regions of Europe a short time later.\textsuperscript{755} However, the Dominicans’ lack of official affiliation eventually became a problem under the new canons of Lateran IV, which required that they write an approved rule for their order or adopt one, such as Augustine’s or Benedict’s. In this regard, the Dominicans accepted Augustine’s \textit{Rule}, written in the sixth century, as their official guidelines for daily life in the


\textsuperscript{748} Melville, 2016, 174.

\textsuperscript{749} Melville, 2016, 174.

\textsuperscript{750} Melville, 2016, 174.

\textsuperscript{751} Melville, 2016, 174.

\textsuperscript{752} Melville, 2016, 174.

\textsuperscript{753} Melville, 2016, 174.

\textsuperscript{754} Melville, 2016, 175.

\textsuperscript{755} Melville, 2016, 175.
order. This was an important decision because having an approved rule of the church distinguished the Dominicans from the outside sects and heretical groups.

The Waldensians, unlike the Cathars, did not reject the need for the sacraments but only those sacraments which were administered by those they considered to be “unworthy priests”. 756 Their remedy for this problem was to train “their own ministers” and independent preachers, arguing that doing so was allowed because of the “priesthood of all believers”. 757 The Waldensians were not so much a movement of doctrinal opposition, but they did pose a challenge and threat to the church magisterium as they sought to rectify the problems of corrupt, immoral and inept clergy through their own outside means. 758 In the end, the Waldensians were “reconciled” to the church and given permission by Pope Innocent III to continue preaching as long as they “avoided doctrinal issues”. 759 These outside religious groups and movements, including the newly sanctioned orders like the Dominicans, are important to underscore because they demonstrate the scrambled but strident efforts to bring renewal and change to the ailing church of the high Middle Ages. It is into this chaotic historical and shifting cultural context of popular and often confusing religious movements, along with a new era of university education that Francis steps on the scene to practise his radical ideal of poverty, innovative preaching style and effective pastoral care. In the next chapter, I recount Francis’s biography using as my primary text, Thomas of Celano’s Vita Prima (1229).

756 Barber, 1993, 166.
757 Barber, 1993, 166.
758 Barber, 1993, 166.
759 Barber, 1993, 166. Barber notes that the Waldensians were “not met from within but by another and in many ways with similar impulse to that of the Franciscans” (166).
Chapter 6: Francis’s Biography

In chapters three and four, I proposed an alternative way to conceive of Christian humility - one which counteracts the modern critiques and promotes human flourishing - using concepts drawn from the lifelong learning theory. Lifelong learners are considered open, self-aware, creatively adaptive in the face of life’s complexities, and they are willing to collaborate with others to improve themselves and the world around them. To support this theory and demonstrate how lifelong learning works, I put forth the idea of applying it to the type of Christian humility that was practised and expressed by the well-known, thirteenth-century saint, Francis of Assisi. To this end, I introduced Francis in chapter five by examining some of the relevant parts of his historical context of the high Middle Ages. In this current chapter, I use a primary text, the *Vita Prima* (previously mentioned) with support from secondary sources, to portray Francis’s life story through to his canonisation in 1228. This account of Francis’s biography provides a reference point for the events and episodes that I discuss in chapter seven. There, I examine Francis’s practices of humility by using the concepts of the lifelong learning theory as a lens through which to reconsider and reinterpret his example.

Choosing a Primary Text

Francis of Assisi remains a popular and revered icon or “model of humanity” today, which is why portraying his life story might seem like a “tortured” endeavour for most historians.760 For example, one of the issues confronting the writing of a credible historical depiction of Francis is that the earliest extant texts about his life were written by hagiographers or authors sanctioned by the church to do so.761 For many researchers, these types of biographers are considered biased because they start from the premise that Francis is a saint, interpreting his story through a rose-coloured

760 André Vauchez, ed., *Francis of Assisi* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2012), xii. A few examples of Francis’s notoriety today are Joan Acocella’s treatment of Francis in *The New Yorker*, “Rich Man, Poor Man, The Radical Visions of St. Francis”, 88.43 (January 2013): 72–77, or the extensive but perhaps more popular-level writings of Jon M. Sweeney in his various edited volumes such as, *The Complete Francis of Assisi: His Life, The Complete Writings and the Little Flowers* (Ashland, OH: Paraclete Press, 2015). Both Acocella and Sweeney portray Francis in a positive light, if not radical, as an example and inspiration for living in a modern society. 761 Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42-44. Stump also contends that “Francis wrote a great deal”, including “letters, exhortations, and admonitions to others” much of which is extant (44). Stump, an analytic philosopher, uses Francis’s story and interprets it as a “typological categorization” of what it means to love God and to experience his love in return (41). On the basis of this “Franciscan mode” of relating to God, Stump explores the biblical narrative through which she then attempts to construct a defense of theodicy or “morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil” in the world (20). Stump’s portrayal and usage of Francis’s story is but another example of its ongoing popularity across disciplines today.
Thus, to get an accurate picture of who Francis of Assisi was, at least from the perspective of a modern Medieval historian, is like the quest to uncover the historical Jesus, whereby scholars are constantly faced with overwhelming critical issues. Some scholars have gone so far as to claim that “no one has ever written about St Francis in a way that is completely satisfactory”. In this chapter, I am not suggesting that my portrayal of Francis’s biography is the definitive one or that it is “completely” satisfying. In text-critical scholarship, a “classic text” refers to a non-scriptural text, received by a Christian community or communities as a “broadly orthodox expression of its faith and which has played and continues to play an important role in the development of Christian tradition – that is, it has been fruitful either in terms of practice or theory”. In this regard, I contend that Thomas of Celano’s Vita Prima (or First Life of Francis, published in 1229) fits such a description.

**Thomas of Celano’s Vita Prima**

In April of 1228, Pope Gregory IX called for the construction of a “burial church” in honour of Francis of Assisi and his order. In that same year, Gregory sanctioned “Brother Thomas of Celano (d. 1260)” to write down Francis’s “life” story as a way to provide the “literary monument” to coincide with “the architectural celebration of Francis”. Gregory was “intent upon the spiritual renewal” of the regional church and sanctioned Thomas to write with this end in view. Thomas is considered the first person in history to be commissioned to write Francis’s hagiography.

Historically, little is known about Thomas of Celano. He was born into a noble family, the Conti dei Marsi, sometime between 1185-1190 in Celano, a small city in the mountains, east of Rome.

---

762 Stump, 2010, 42. Stump notes that hagiographies might also be negatively biased and depict some of the “worst features” of saints (42).
767 The decree, called Recolentes qualifier, was put forth on 29 April 1228.
Because of his status as a nobleman, Thomas received a good liberal arts education, possibly at the Benedictine monastery of Saint John the Baptist, near Celano. Some scholars consider Thomas’s status and perspective in writing about Francis to be that of an “eyewitness” because he attended Francis’s canonisation.

Thomas’s writings include three volumes in a series: The *Vita Prima* (the *First Life* comprised of Three Books - also called, *The Life of Saint Francis*), *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* which is commonly referred to as the *Vita Secunda or Second Life* (1247), and finally *The Treatise on the Miracles* (1254). Thomas’s *Second Life* was a “collection of the stories circulating about Francis” nearly two decades following Francis’s death. Thomas also wrote *Legenda ad Usum Chori, The Legend for Use in the Choir* (1230), which was to be read at Divine Office or the prayers said throughout the day at morning, evening (vespers) or compline (nightly).

No biography was written about Thomas of Celano but, in 1221, he was appointed as the custodian over the Franciscan orders at Worm, Speyer and Cologne in Germany, where he later became the vicar, overseeing all the orders in Germany. Eventually, though it is not certain why, Thomas returned to Italy. Some scholars believe that Thomas likely wanted to attend Francis’s canonisation ceremony, 16 July 1228 and then stayed. Thomas spent the remaining years of his life between Assisi and Tagliacozza (fifteen miles west of Celano), serving the convent of San Giovanni di Val dei Varri. Thomas died on 4 October 1260 and became known as “the saint who wrote about the saint”.

In that same year, Bonaventure, “the Seraphic Doctor” and Minister General of the Franciscan order in Paris was commissioned by the church magisterium to compose a “final hagiography of Francis”, which he entitled, the *Major and Minor Legends* (published in 1266). To

---

773 Cusato, 2000, 37.
774 Armstrong et al, 1999, 172-173. Note that it was in the *Second Life (The Remembrance)* and not the *Vita Prima* that Thomas records the incident of Francis hearing Christ speak from the crucifix at the church of Saint Damian.
781 Madigan, 2015, 229.
compile the Legends, Bonaventure drew foundationally from Thomas’s Vita Prima. Bonaventure’s Legends, at the time, were to serve as the definitive depiction of Francis’s life from that point forward, which meant that all other past documents, stories and accounts of Francis were to be destroyed, including the Vita Prima. However, the Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries were able to safeguard most of these older texts for the sake of posterity. The church’s sanctioning of Bonaventure to write his Legends was due in part to the many unsanctioned renditions, and perhaps false accounts of Francis, that were emerging in the mid-1220s (Thomas’s not being one of them), which were creating confusion. The church magisterium hoped to set forth a comprehensive biography once and for all as a way to quell the notoriety of these specious accounts. Moreover, it was hoped that Bonaventure’s new work on Francis’s “pattern of holiness”, portrayed in the Legends, might encourage a new wave of spiritual renewal in the church.

However, contemporary Franciscan scholar, Jacques Dalarun has argued that Bonaventure’s Legends impose large “omissions” from Francis’s real life. Bonaventure, asserts Dalarun, eliminates so-called “misadventures” of roughly 250 episodes, which are present in four earlier texts: The First and Second Life of Thomas of Celano, the Legend of Perugia, and The Legend of the Three Companions (not discussed here). What Dalarun’s research underscores is that Bonaventure, who relied heavily on the Vita Prima, excluded many episodes that he deemed unsuitable for his biography of Francis. Dalarun shows that these missing episodes were typically the ones that made Francis out to be less saintly and more human, unpredictable, and at times neglectful of the order. In this regard, Thomas’s Vita Prima does not shy away from such human occurrences of misadventure in Francis’s life. This implies that Thomas’s work is not only the oldest known biography but also the most robust, authentic, and complete depiction of Francis’s life

---

783 Madigan, 2015, 229.
784 Madigan, 2015, 229.
788 Jacques Dalarun, The Misadventure of Francis of Assisi, trans. Edward Hagman (St Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute Publications, 2002), 254-258. In the end, argues Dalarun, Bonaventure focused on the success of the order as justification for Francis’s life while other accounts, including the Vita Prima majored on Francis’s personhood, uniqueness, and ideals as the reason for the order’s existence (254).
789 Dalarun, 2002, 256-257. Dalarun asserts that the “Seraph’s feathers” (referring to Bonaventure) were ruffled by “the black hen” (or Francis) who did not meet the standards for the “hero” that the church needed by the 1260s. Thus, Bonaventure would make Francis out to be an “angelic figure” that would incite reform (256-257). Dalarun’s concern is to show Francis as the human he was – the saint who had his share of “misadventures” (257).
790 Dalarun, 2002, 257.
792 Dalarun, 2002, 258.
over and against Bonaventure’s Legends.

Thomas’s *Vita Prima*, credibly translated into English, is comprised of 40 total chapters (with 126 sections and 117 pages) across three Books. Book One is composed of 30 chapters with 87 sections (*1Cel 1.I-XXX*:1-87), which depicts Francis’s early life, conversion, and the founding of the Order of Lesser Brothers, with details of Francis’s ideal of poverty, his preaching and the pastoral ministry of the order. Book Two is comprised of ten chapters, with 30 sections (*1Cel 2.I-X*:88-118) and entails Francis’s final two years up until he died in 1226. Book Three is comprised of seven sections, which describe Francis’s canonisation into sainthood (*1Cel 3.I*:119-126). Thomas summarises the *Vita Prima*:

[T]he first book follows an historical sequence and is devoted principally to the purity of his blessed way of life, to his virtuous conduct and his wholesome teaching. In this book, I have also introduced a few of the many miracles … The second book, on the other hand, tells of his deeds from the next to last year of his life up to his happy death. The third book contains many miracles ….

For Thomas, Francis is a human example of “holy deeds” that the church needs not only in the Middle Ages, but in every order, sex, and age. Thomas finds in Francis a “clear pattern”, the “preeminent saint”. Although Thomas writes as a hagiographer, he weaves a masterful “tapestry” of multi-coloured threads, including historical data, ecclesial renewal as mission, and Augustinian theology. In Thomas’s “Prologue” he writes:

It is my desire to explain in orderly details the acts and life of our most blessed father Francis: pious devotion and truth will always be my guide and instructor. Since everything which he did and taught is retained fully in the memory of none, I have endeavored to set forth, insofar as I was able, though with unskilled words, at least those things which I heard from his own mouth or I learned from trustworthy and esteemed witnesses, just as the illustrious Pope Gregory has commanded.

Here Thomas concludes that there is no person and no source that has retained all of Francis’s activities and sayings but he will give his rendering as best as he is able.

---

798 Madigan 2015, 228.
Francis’s Name and Birthplace

Thomas writes that “In the city of Assisi, ... there was a man named Francis”. Francis’s economic privilege is evidenced immediately by his name. Francis’s father (Pietro di Bernardone) travelled to western Europe to conduct his mercantile business and favoured France. Thus, Francis, born Giovanni, was nicknamed, ‘Francesco’ di Bernardone, “The Frenchman”, and the name stuck. Francis was born in 1181/2 in the central Umbrian region of Italy, in Assisi - “a place” that would eventually come to be associated with Francis almost exclusively. Little is known of Assisi since its popularity has grown due in large part to Francis himself.

In the thirteenth century, the town of Assisi, within the geographical confines of the Spoleto Valley, was surrounded by a fortified wall and perhaps inhabited by three to four thousand residents. Assisi’s revenue was drawn mostly from businesses in the surrounding countryside, which included the economic expansions of the day under the authority of Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (r. 1152-1190), who was crowned King in 1155 but later died on route to the third crusade. Thomas underscores the fact that parents in Francis’s day, particularly those within the rising merchant class, were guilty of spoiling their children by giving them unnecessary excesses.

Francis’s Youth

Francis’s early lifestyle, as a merchant’s son, was characterised by an air of “flamboyance, foolishness, frivolity, excess, indulgence, and arrogance”. Francis was known among his peers to be generous, a joker and one who sang songs, often wearing “flowing garments” as opposed to the practical, cheaper and coarser cloths of the day. Francis had a concrete experience of money and knew what it was like to have coins in his pocket. Because of this, Francis attracted the attention of petty criminals, who were looking for a handout or funds for their escapades. Thomas

799 1Cel 1.I.1, 182.
806 1Cel 1.I.1, 182.
807 The family business translated, some speculate, into a lifestyle whereby Francis could wear flamboyant clothes and engage in a somewhat luxurious youth. From the Legend of the Three Companions, which Vauchez asserts is the best source for depicting Francis’s youth, Francis was known to dress as though he were a prince rather than the son of a merchant. Yet, Francis was known for his generosity and perhaps for frivolity related to spending money on others (Vauchez, 2012, 7).
808 1Cel 1.I.2, 183.
810 1Cel 1.I.2, 182-183.
does not interpret Francis’s generosity as a virtue, but more so as Francis’s poor stewardship of the assets and money which came from his father’s business. Francis was frivolous and labelled by the local townspeople as an irresponsible and immature youth, which continued for what seemed like a long season, roughly into Francis’s mid-twenties.

A recurring issue for Francis, from his youth into his adult life, was his bodily illnesses and physical afflictions. Some scholars describe Francis as being “sickly”. Thomas characterises Francis’s illnesses as a means by which God sought to get Francis’s attention in attempts to draw Francis away from “the ancient serpent” or the devil. This seemed to work because Francis became disillusioned with his life and began questioning his lifestyle and the imprudent exploits of his youth. Francis mulled over his life within himself only to find that he came up short, not only by his own standards but before God. However, these early, inward reflections were only shallow or unsatisfactory in wholly converting Francis. Although Francis saw himself as contemptible and worthless, he continued to avoid God’s “divine grasp”. In the short term, to appease his inner turmoil, Francis turned to military endeavours as a way of “ignoring God’s plan”.

Francis was enchanted by stories of knighthood and was “seduced” to adventure, glory, and “courtly ideology” as these tales depicted them. He was a romantic hero and believed that a great destiny and purpose awaited him. However, after an unexpected, year-long imprisonment in Perugia (South Italy) from a failed military campaign, Francis returned home ill for the “greater part of 1204”. Due to this trauma of imprisonment, Francis was never the same again in either his manner or his spirit. Francis seemed noticeably affected by a new restlessness and a growing sense of detachment from the world.

---

811 1Cel I.i.2, 182-183.
812 1Cel I.i.2, 182-183.
813 1Cel I.i.2, 182-183.
815 1Cel I.II.3, 184.
816 1Cel I.II.3-4, 185.
817 1Cel I.II.4, 185.
818 1Cel I.II.4, 185.
819 1Cel I.II.4, 185.
820 1Cel I.II.4, 185.
821 Vauchez, 2012, 16.
Still, Francis remained hopeful that one day he might be a bold and fearless knight.\footnote{Robson, 2012, 19. Robson writes that knighthood was Francis’s lifelong “dream” (129).} Once, he set off under Walter of Brienne III (d.1205) on a military expedition, which involved Philip II of France and King John Lackland of England (1166-1216) over peace in Normandy.\footnote{Madigan, 2015, 230.} Before departing on this mission, Francis had a dream or vision that showed his entire house full of weaponry, saddles, shields and spears.\footnote{1Cel 1.II.5, 186.} He took this vision to mean that God was confirming his journey with Sir Walter and a victorious outcome.\footnote{1Cel 1.II.5, 186.} Thomas asserts that Francis, unfortunately, had missed the point of the vision.\footnote{1Cel 1.II.5, 186.} God meant to dissuade Francis from going on the expedition.\footnote{Madigan, 2015, 230.} In the end, Francis’s illness forced him to abort the mission as they entered nearby Spoleto.\footnote{Robson, 2012, 1.} It is here in Spoleto while dreaming that Francis heard the call of Christ which summoned him to renounce his commitment to his vanities in exchange for a new life “fighting” for a different cause - a \textit{divine cause}.\footnote{1Cel 1.II.4, 185.} On Francis’s journey back to Assisi, he pondered the ruins of his military ambitions and his ardent desires to win renown and honour. Without these, Francis seemed utterly unsure about his future and what he should do with his life.\footnote{1Cel 1.III.6, 187.} He had once thought that adventure and knighthood could “fill up what was lacking in his soul”\footnote{1Cel 1.III.6, 187.} Francis was now theoretically positioned to set out on a new errand with a new goal - to discover what God’s will for his life might be.\footnote{1Cel 1.III.6, 187.}

### Francis's Conversion

The pattern going forward for Francis was one of personal and spiritual obsession.\footnote{Vauchez, 2012, 20. Vauchez describes this season for Francis as “continuously and constantly” fraught with temptations and a measure of split personality “on a psychological level” as there seemed to be “two lives of Francis” (20-21).} As he had spent himself in foolishness, flamboyance and frivolity for glory in military conquest, now Francis had a new obsession, which meant that he agonised over what God wanted from his life.\footnote{1Cel 1.III.6, 187.} However, Francis kept this new-found quest to himself because he knew that the people of Assisi might mock him and label this as just another one of his arrogant, petty and childish endeavours.\footnote{1Cel 1.III.6, 187.} During this tumultuous time, Francis had a friend (unnamed) whom he loved “more than all the
rest”. Francis, now called “the man of God” (by Thomas), poured out his confused thoughts to this friend, who listened with “eagerness and kindness”.841

One day, Francis entered a nearby cave outside of Assisi, while his friend sat outside waiting.842 Francis prayed and did vigil with God (for nearly a month), “burning inwardly with a divine fire”.843 It was in this cave, in secret, that Francis began to see God’s will for his life, which caused “suffering in his soul”.844 Francis understood that he needed to turn away from those things which he knew had offended God.845 When Francis finally emerged from the cave, he was somehow changed, but exhausted.846 Thomas portrays the sense that one man entered that cave, but a wholly different person departed into the world.847 Following this experience, God continued to show Francis all that he had in store for him. For example, “one day” Francis invoked the Lord in his mercy with his whole heart to show him what he was to do in the world.848 God’s answer at the time was that Francis do “great deeds” at home in Assisi.849 Francis obeyed God, but remained guarded, and spoke in “riddles” to locals about his divine calling.850

The townspeople knew that Francis seemed changed, or different somehow, but thought that Francis was in love and preparing to get married.851 To such rumours, Francis replied that he was most assuredly in love and that his “bride” was the fairest and most beautiful of them all.852 Francis had embraced the calling to be a “minister of the gospel”, and his new bride was Christ.853 Francis continued to peel away “the trappings of his old character” to a profound level as a way to construct “a wholly new identity with little continuity to his inherited one” as the son of a merchant.854 Francis was “groping” to understand his calling from God, and did not know where God might lead him.855 For Francis to gain this understanding, he had to “slowly alienate himself from the
familiar structures of his existence”. He drew instead closer to what was unfamiliar to him, hoping to grasp what to do in the world as a minister of Christ’s gospel.

Francis spent increasingly longer amounts of time reflecting and praying, with “a growing asceticism”. His restlessness and search for clues about his future led him to make regular visits to cathedral churches and chapels in the region, where he prayed with eagerness for a sign from God. The chronology is unclear and contested, but during one of these fitful sessions of praying and searching, Francis got up and journeyed on horseback to a market square that adjoins the cathedral of San Feliciano at Foligno (northwest of Assisi). There, he sold some of his father’s expensive (scarlet) cloth and the horse on which he had ridden into town. The money that Francis received for these commodities felt like a burden, and he did not want to carry the coins within his pockets for even an hour. As Francis returned to Assisi, he stopped at the church in Saint Damian that was in ruins (b. 1103). When Francis walked in, he was in awe and wonder at both the church itself and the poor priest inside of it. Francis greeted the priest and took his hands and kissed them. Francis wanted to give the burdensome coins to the priest. The priest refused them mostly because he feared Francis’s father and the powerful position of his family in the region. The priest was suspicious about Francis’s motives and reasons for giving the money to the church. The priest knew about Francis’s youthful life of foolishness, “stupidity”, joking and arrogance. He did not trust Francis. After more pleadings with subsequent refusals, Francis finally threw the coins onto an open window sill of the church and asked the priest if he might stay there for an indeterminable amount of time. Thomas says that Francis, at this moment, cared for money as much as he cared for “dust”.

---

856 Madigan, 2015, 230-231.
857 Madigan, 2015, 231.
858 Madigan, 2015, 231.
859 Madigan, 2015, 231.
860 Madigan, 2015, 231.
861 1Cel I.IV.8, 189.
862 1Cel I.IV.8, 189.
863 1Cel I.IV.8-9, 189.
864 1Cel I.IV.8-9, 189.
865 1Cel I.IV.8, 189.
866 1Cel I.IV.9, 189.
867 1Cel I.IV.9, 190.
868 1Cel I.IV.9, 189.
869 1Cel I.IV.9, 189.
870 1Cel I.IV.9, 189.
871 1Cel I.IV.9, 189-190.
872 1Cel I.IV.9, 190.
Sometime during this period, Francis heard Christ speaking to him from the crucifix at the church of Saint Damian. Christ instructed Francis to “repair the ancient church”. To these words, Francis felt compelled and responded spontaneously, symbolically, and histrionically (or emotionally), even before comprehending them consciously. Meanwhile, Francis’s father was searching for him. Pietro di Bernardone was like a “diligent spy”, who sought to find out what had happened to his son by inquiring of the family’s friends and neighbours, including sequestering the aid of local authorities for Francis’s return. After Francis’s father discovered his location, he raced there to retrieve Francis. Francis heard of his father’s anger and the coming mob from town and he asked to be lowered into a secret chamber at the church where he hid for a month. Francis enjoyed this stint of secrecy and spent many of the days there praying and weeping. Finally, Francis was overcome with such a sense of joy in his calling to the gospel that he came out of the pit and the darkness to face, not only his family and father, but all those who were seeking to persecute him.

As Francis had anticipated, upon emerging from hiding, he was mocked and ridiculed and labelled as “out of his mind”. The townspeople threw mud and stones at Francis. By this time, Francis had become immune to these sorts of assaults. The “gossip” about Francis spread throughout the streets of the city and finally reached his father. Francis’s father raced to him, not to free him or to protect him from the townspeople, but as Thomas writes, “to destroy him” and pounce on him like a wolf on a lamb. Francis’s father berated Francis, beat him, bound him with chains, and then angrily tried to bend Francis’s will towards his own.

The episode is somewhat chilling, yet through it all, Francis seemed stronger and more steadfast in his resolve to serve Christ and fear God, despite the wishes of his family and father. Francis was “sequestered” to his house by the local government, which was under the thumb of his

---

874 Madigan, 2015, 231.
875 1Cel 1.V.10, 190.
876 1Cel 1.V.10, 190.
877 1Cel 1.V.10, 190.
878 1Cel 1.V.10, 190.
879 1Cel 1.V.10, 191.
880 1Cel 1.V.10, 191.
881 1Cel 1.V.10, 191.
882 1Cel 1.V.11, 191.
883 1Cel 1.V.11, 191.
884 1Cel 1.V.11, 191.
885 1Cel 1.V.12, 191.
886 1Cel 1.V.12, 192.
887 1Cel 1.V.12, 192.
father, until which time Francis might amend his ways and relinquish his outlandish ideas about serving God, rather than the family business. Francis’s father had pressing, out-of-town business and left Francis bound in chains in their house. Francis’s mother, Pica, released her son and he left. Francis’s release from the chains of his father symbolised Francis’s new, free spirit, from which he found joy, confidence and a “greater heart” for serving Christ. When his father returned, he raced to seize Francis, shaking and screaming at his son, commanding him to come back home. However, Francis was now overcome by “the fear of the Lord” and refused his father’s demands. At this point, Francis’s father began a new quest.

Pietro wanted Francis to legally relinquish his rights to the family business and any future inheritance by the witness of the town’s bishop, Guido I.

Francis’s Famous Renunciation

When Francis was confronted by his father in front of Guido, Francis quickly (with no hesitation), stripped naked and laid down his clothes as a way to return them to his father. This act was complete and included Francis’s trousers, which meant that he was standing naked before everyone at the townhall. The bishop saw that Francis was sincere and admired Francis’s “fervor and determination”, gathering Francis into his arms as a way to cover his nakedness with his own mantle. Thomas describes this moment for the bishop as a holy encounter. However, at witnessing this act, Francis’s father “snapped” and became deeply perplexed by the increasingly unpredictable and eccentric behaviours of his son. Their familial relationship was terminated at this “hearing in the court”. Guido continued to play a significant role of charity in the development

---

888 1Cel 1.V.12, 192.
889 1Cel 1.VI.13, 192.
890 1Cel 1.VI.13, 192-193. See also, Manselli, 1988, 30.
891 1Cel 1.VI.13, 193.
892 1Cel 1.VI.13, 193.
893 1Cel 1.VI.13, 193.
894 1Cel 1.VI.14, 193.
895 1Cel 1.VI.14, 193.
896 1Cel 1.VI.14, 193.
897 1Cel 1.VI.15, 193.
898 1Cel 1.VI.15, 193. There are many contemporary interpretations of Francis’s actions here. See, for example, Richard C. Trexler, Naked Before the Father – The Renunciation of Francis of Assisi (Paris: Peter Lang Publishing, 1989).
899 1Cel 1.VI.15, 193-194.
900 1Cel 1.VI.15, 193-194.
901 1Cel 1.VI.15, 193-194.
902 Robson, 2012, 2. See also, 1Cel 1.VI.15, 194.
of Francis’s new vocation, which sounded “the death-knell to [his future] as a merchant.”\textsuperscript{903} In this one dramatic event, Francis proved to all onlookers that nothing could stand in the way of his vision that had come to him from God for a life and ministry to the world.

Francis’s dramatic relinquishment of his clothes and his family’s inheritance ended by Francis walking naked into the woods, singing.\textsuperscript{904} There, a band of thieves attacked Francis demanding to know who he was. Francis called himself “a herald of the great King”.\textsuperscript{905} The thieves replied to this by beating Francis, leaving him in a ditch and calling him a “stupid herald of God”.\textsuperscript{906} As Francis lay in the ditch, he shouted the praises of God for all to hear.\textsuperscript{907} This incident did not deter Francis. On the contrary, such events invigorated Francis in his mission to administer the gospel to the world. Francis eventually wandered to a local cloister of monks for a short season, wearing only a shirt, labouring in the kitchen where he hoped to receive a portion of soup to eat.\textsuperscript{908} Francis was not given the soup, nor did he receive clothing at the cloister.\textsuperscript{909} He moved on, not out of anger or resentment, but out of “necessity”.\textsuperscript{910}

Francis travelled to the city of Gubbio (north of Assisi) where an “old friend” gave him a cheap tunic to wear.\textsuperscript{911} Francis’s renown grew quickly as news of him spread throughout the region. The leader of the cloister, once understanding to whom it was that they had refused soup and clothing, found Francis and apologised to him, asking for his forgiveness.\textsuperscript{912} At another time, Francis, or “the holy lover of profound humility” (as Thomas now calls him) stayed with lepers and “for God’s sake” cleaned them, served and cared for them, washing the pus from their wounds.\textsuperscript{913} This was perhaps one of the clearest indications of Francis’s conversion.\textsuperscript{914} Francis was known to have disdain, disgust, and general repugnance towards lepers throughout his early life.\textsuperscript{915} In this regard, sometimes miles away from a leprosarium, Francis would have previously put his hands over his nose.\textsuperscript{916} But one day as Francis met a leper, Francis (with purposeful intention) moved towards the

\textsuperscript{903} Robson, 2012, 2. See also, \textit{1Cel 1.VI.15}, 194.
\textsuperscript{904} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 194.
\textsuperscript{905} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 194.
\textsuperscript{906} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 194.
\textsuperscript{907} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 194.
\textsuperscript{908} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 194.
\textsuperscript{909} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 195.
\textsuperscript{910} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 195.
\textsuperscript{911} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 195.
\textsuperscript{912} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.16}, 195.
\textsuperscript{913} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.17}, 195.
\textsuperscript{914} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.17}, 195.
\textsuperscript{915} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.17}, 195.
\textsuperscript{916} \textit{1Cel 1.VII.17}, 195.
leper and kissed him, gaining “victory over himself”. In Francis’s own words, he states: ‘When I was in my sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers, and the Lord led me among them and I showed mercy to them’. For Francis, this was “a dramatic personal reorientation that brought forth spiritual fruit”. “[Francis] had found peace.” It seemed that it was Francis’s experience with lepers that brought about the true change in Francis’s life that he had always wanted.

Francis’s changes were gradual and personal to him. Francis practised helping the poor and sought to show kindness and mercy to those who had nothing and to those excluded and afflicted in society. Once, Francis “rebuked a poor person” for begging alms from him, but then immediately repented. After this, Francis began living out what he considered to be the “way of penance”, wherein he believed that whenever someone asked anything of him, in God’s name, that it would be a disgrace not to help them. Thus, Francis never denied anything to those who begged from him, as far as he was able.

**Francis’s Early Ministry**

Francis’s newfound “freedom” meant that he could now turn his efforts towards rebuilding the church as Christ had commanded him to do. Although Francis’s family ties had been broken by the public renunciation of his inheritance, he could begin building a new house, with Christ as the cornerstone and firm foundation. With clear instructions from Christ himself, Francis began rebuilding and “working on Saint Maria degli Angeli (better known as Portiuncula) just outside the town walls of Assisi and the church of Saint Damian, [both] in a dilapidated state”. In a short time, rock by rock and stone by stone, Francis literally rebuilt and refurbished the Saint Damian church. From this start, Francis went about rebuilding the cathedral churches around the region. These endeavours often brought ridicule from Francis’s former companions among the youth of Assisi. Francis’s old friends thought that he was in “the grip of some form of madness”, so they callously

---

917 1Cel 1.VII.17, 195.
918 1Cel 1.VII.17, 195.
919 Augustine O. Thompson, Francis of Assisi, the Life (London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 19.
920 Thompson, 2013, 19.
921 Madigan, 2015, 231.
922 1Cel 1.VII.17, 195.
923 1Cel 1.VII.17, 195.
924 1Cel 1.VII.17, 195-196.
925 1Cel 1.VII.17, 195-196.
926 1Cel 1.VII.17, 195-196.
927 1Cel 1.VIII.18, 195.
928 1Cel 1.VIII.18, 195.
929 Madigan, 2015, 231.
930 Thompson, 2013, 21ff.
None of this deterred Francis, who began preaching in his hometown of Assisi rather than in distant and remote missionary territory. He announced the gospel, exhorting all to do penance for their indiscretions and failings against God. Although Francis’s activities brought criticism from those closest to him—strangers at the time, such as Lady Clare and Bernard, began ardently following Francis. Francis asked these and subsequent followers to sell all that they owned, giving the money to the poor. Thus, a small company of them moved from place to place, staying near Assisi and working together to rebuild and refurbish ruined churches. Bernard was “a man of Assisi with holy and simple character”. Along with Lady Clare (also a native of Assisi), other women, who eventually called themselves the “Poor Ladies” started following Francis. Clare had a reputation as a woman of high esteem, seen as virtuous in charity, humility, chastity, and poverty. 

By the third year of Francis’s conversion, Portiuncula was rebuilt. Francis’s clothes had also taken on a distinctive pattern—a hermit’s tunic, a belt, a staff and shoes. Then, one day as the gospel from the New Testament was being read by a priest during the liturgy, people were hearing it and being drawn into the church. Francis too was drawn, and after the service approached the priest, begging him to explain the gospel passage to him from the text that he had read. The priest went line by line through the gospel - Matthew 10:9-10 wherein Jesus commanded his disciples to possess no silver nor money, and to journey with one tunic, no shoes and preach the kingdom of God and penance to all people. He said to himself (and to God), “This is what I want ... this is what I seek with all my

931 Robson, 2012, 2.
932 Robson, 2012, 2.
933 Armstrong et al, 1999, 1Cel VIII.18, 197 and 1Cel X.24, 203.
934 Vauchez, 2012, 45.
935 1Cel I.X.21, 201.
936 1Cel 1.X.24, 203.
937 1Cel 1.IX.21, 196-197.
938 1Cel 1.VIII.18-20, 197-199. It is beyond the scope to discuss Clare and her influence or what her relationship with Francis and the order says or reveals about women in medieval times. See Constant J. Mews and Claire Renkin, eds., Interpreting Francis and Clare of Assisi: From the Middle Ages to the Present (Melbourne: Broughton Publishing, 2010). In this collection of essays, Dalarun, for one, contends that Francis subverts the various categories of the sexual, cultural and societal norms of his day and turns them “topsy-turvy” (11). See also, Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, eds., Francis and Clare, The Complete Works (London: Mission Society of St. Paul, 1982).
939 1Cel I.X.21, 201.
940 1Cel I.X.21, 201.
941 1Cel I.X.22, 201.
942 1Cel I.X.22, 201.
943 1Cel I.X.22, 201.
944 1Cel I.X.22, 201-202.
heart” and he overflowed with joy. He immediately, Francis took off his shoes, kept one very “rough” tunic, and traded the leather belt he wore for a simple rope. He dressed this way so as not to attract attention from the world, believing that such attire would not be envied by any person in the world. He wanted to follow all that Jesus commanded in the gospels “to the letter” and sought to do so as his life’s mission.

With this mission and way of dressing, Francis began preaching the Word of God. Francis preached the peace of Christ to those, for example, who hated peace, and people were converted by his message. Francis’s life was radical to onlookers as he ate very little, rarely slept and preached the gospel to all who would listen to him. Thomas remarks that when Francis preached, his words were “sweet and flowing with honey”. Francis was not well-studied in scripture, but lived them as best he could as an “imitator of Christ”. Francis grew “day by day” in the grace of the Holy Spirit, which helped him to attain greater determination and vigilance for his mission. Francis was considered a “model of conversion” and other followers soon joined him, such as Giles and Philip, bringing the number in their company to seven.

As best as he was able, Francis instructed the new brothers that were with him. Francis found great joy in this season by praying, preaching and instructing. Thomas writes that Francis “began to lose himself”, which meant that Francis was losing the dark and bounded notions of the self in exchange for the new and “changed” man that he was becoming. Francis rejoiced in what God was doing in and through his ministry and prophetically proclaimed to the brothers, “God will make us grow into a great multitude and will spread us to the ends of the earth”. Francis used phrases such as a “great nation” or a “crowd speaking other languages” and that new followers were coming to them soon. The brothers were, of course, happy and overjoyed to hear such news from

945 1Cel 1.IX.22, 202.
946 1Cel 1.IX.22, 202.
947 1Cel 1.IX.22, 202.
948 1Cel 1.IX.22, 202.
949 1Cel 1.IX-X.22-23, 202-203.
950 1Cel 1.X.23, 203.
951 1Cel 1.X.24, 203.
952 1Cel 1.X.25, 204.
953 1Cel 1.X.25, 204.
954 1Cel 1.XI.26, 205.
955 1Cel 1.XI.26, 205.
956 1Cel 1.XI.26, 205.
957 1Cel 1.XI.27, 205.
958 1Cel 1.XI.27, 205.
959 1Cel 1.XI.27, 205.
960 1Cel 1.XI.27, 205-206.
their leader.\textsuperscript{961}

**Francis’s Official Sanctioning in Rome**

In those early days, Francis sent his followers out in pairs to serve the poor and to preach the gospel message to the masses, i.e., to the rich, poor, noble, insignificant, simple, illiterate or clerical.\textsuperscript{962} Francis made it clear that God wanted to reach all people, those from the heights of society and “those rejected by the world” among the abject poor and peasant classes.\textsuperscript{963} Thomas notes that Francis’s followers, at this time, regarded themselves as “useless servants”, but faithful and ever-committed to Francis, sharing with him their innermost thoughts and the “immediate impulses of their souls”.\textsuperscript{964} In 1209 (though Thomas gives no dates in the original text), the number of Francis’s followers was increasing daily.\textsuperscript{965} At this time, Francis presented to the brothers a simple “rule” or “form of life”.\textsuperscript{966} These words, writes Thomas, came primarily from “the holy gospel” outlining an early ideal of voluntary poverty as a way to imitate and follow Christ.\textsuperscript{967}

Francis greatly wanted an official confirmation from the sitting Pope, Innocent III.\textsuperscript{968} Thus, the brothers, twelve in total, journeyed to Rome.\textsuperscript{969} The bishop from Assisi (Guido I, who had witnessed Francis’s renunciation) was also visiting Rome at the time.\textsuperscript{970} Guido loved Francis and his followers, including the ministry that they had performed in Assisi, and “reacted strongly” when he saw them arriving in Rome.\textsuperscript{971} Guido feared that Francis and the others were leaving Assisi.\textsuperscript{972} However, once he heard and understood their plan to receive sanctioning by the church magisterium, he vowed to support them.\textsuperscript{973} Francis also asked for the support of the cardinal-bishop of Sabina (in Rome), named John of Saint Paul (d. 1215).\textsuperscript{974} Francis thought highly of John, seeing him as a man who loved the things of heaven more than those things of earth.\textsuperscript{975} John had urged Francis to enter a monastery or into the eremitical way of life, instead of trying to become sanctioned by the

\textsuperscript{961} 1Cel 1.XI.27-28, 206.
\textsuperscript{962} 1Cel 1.XII.26, 205. See also, 1Cel 1.XII.31. 209.
\textsuperscript{963} 1Cel 1.XII.31, 209-210.
\textsuperscript{964} 1Cel 1.XII.30, 209.
\textsuperscript{965} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{966} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{967} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{968} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{969} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{970} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{971} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{972} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{973} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{974} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
\textsuperscript{975} 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.
Pope, to which Francis replied that he had “loftier” desires than to live his life as a monk.\footnote{1Cel.1.XIII.33, 212.} However, John was concerned that Francis and his followers would fail in their attempt to see the Pope, so eventually gave in to Francis and spoke of the group to the Pope.\footnote{1Cel.1.XIII.33, 212.} Innocent III, writes Thomas, was “a glorious man, brilliant, learned and burned with zeal” for matters of the church and that which constituted an authentic Christian faith.\footnote{1Cel.1.XIII.33, 212.} When Innocent heard of Francis’s request for sanctioning, he considered it and then assented to it, warning them of the difficulties that might be ahead of them in their endeavours.\footnote{1Cel.1.XIII.33, 212.} Then, Innocent promised “to grant more things” to Francis and his followers as they increased in number and fervency in the future.\footnote{1Cel.1.XIII.33, 212.} The brothers were overjoyed at this good favour and official sanctioning (if only a verbal affirmation) from so lofty a place.\footnote{1Cel.1.XIII.33, 212.}

Francis’s respect and love for the church remained a constant theme in his life and ministry.\footnote{1Cel.1.XVII.45, 222.} For example, as he instructed his followers about prayer, Francis told them to pray as Christ had taught his disciples with the “Our Father” and to ask Christ to bless the church throughout the world. As their group would draw near to a cathedral church built in any place, if they could see it from a distance, they bowed down and thanked God for it just as Francis did.\footnote{1Cel.1.XVII.46, 223.} Thomas tells of a time when the brothers confessed their sins to “a certain secular priest”, whom many considered to have a “bad reputation”.\footnote{1Cel.1.XVII.46, 223.} They did not wish to believe the gossip about the priest and continued to go to him in “proper reverence”.\footnote{1Cel.1.XVII.46, 223.} In these ways, Francis and the others sought to think only the best about the church and the priests who served it.\footnote{1Cel.1.XVII.46, 223.}

**Francis’s New Religious Order — The Lesser Brothers**

Thomas underscores that during Francis’s time in Rome, standing before Pope Innocent III, he and his followers wanted a new religious order with the name, *Ordo Fratrum Minorum* (or Friars Minor, literally 'Order of Lesser Brothers'), because they wished to be grounded on “the solid rock of
humility” out of which they might practise all other virtues. This notion of “lesser” helped to create an ethos among them as a “devout company”, which flourished in love for one another through “chaste embraces, delightful affection, a holy kiss, sweet conversation, modest laughter, joyful looks, a clear eye … single purpose … and untiring hands”. The lesser brothers were active, daring, obedient, strong, patient and steadfast. They practised “moderation” in all things and sought to live modest and peaceful lives. The brothers kept their “eyes fixed on the ground and their minds set on heaven”, which led them to experience great harmony and a constant calm among themselves in their daily practices. The brothers were not upset with suffering, hardship or physical and material lackings, which made them “supple” towards society and one another – creating a certain openness and flexibility by which they avoided scandal and fostered flourishing amongst themselves and others around them.

As the friars left Rome, affirmed and confirmed by Pope Innocent III, they walked towards the Spoleto Valley and into a deserted place. The company of brothers soon became hungry and had no food available to them. Thomas reports that a man appeared and gave them bread to eat, encouraging them to trust God to provide for their needs. They approached a place near the city of Orte (some 100km south of Assisi) and stayed there about fifteen days. Their practices included some friars walking daily into the city in search of necessary food. They stayed in a local cemetery at a grave site. The brothers took pleasure in knowing that they were in an abandoned and lonely place wherein few carnal and earthly delights could tempt them. The friars began to see how poverty, as they were living it out in daily practice, aided them in their mission to win and draw souls, whom the devil sought to “snatch away” from Christ.

The lesser brothers’ commitment and obedience to this ideal of voluntary poverty gave them a type of freedom because “having nothing” and “loving nothing” meant they had nothing to lose. The fledgling order boldly went to any hazardous place for the sake of their mission, without

987 1Cel XV.38, 217.
988 1Cel XV.39, 218.
990 1Cel XV.40, 219.
991 Cf. 1Cel XIV.34, 213.
992 1Cel XIV.34, 213.
994 1Cel XV.40, 219-220.
995 1Cel XV.40, 219-220.
996 1Cel XIV.34, 213.
997 1Cel XIV.34, 213.
998 1Cel XIV.34, 213.
999 1Cel XIV.35, 214.
1000 1Cel XIV.35, 214.
fear, residing, if necessary “in caves and crypts”.1001 The brothers worked with their hands at any labour, but none that might give rise to scandal among them or in the eyes of the world.1002 Francis instructed the order by his own life and example as they practised living before God and with others in great “confidence”.1003 Francis told the lesser brothers that he was called, not to live for himself alone, but to live for the ones for whom Christ had died.1004

They left Orte, and journeyed on into the Spoleto Valley, preaching peace and penance with the “apostolic authority” that had been given to Francis through the Pope’s blessing and verbal confirmations.1005 As the order grew, it was Francis who, with great discernment, admitted new friars (men of honour and dignity) into the order until roughly 1220, after which, rulings at Lateran IV prescribed a one-year waiting period for new members to join, under the oversight of the church magisterium.1006

Francis’s Preaching Ministry

Francis’s preaching methods were characterised in stark contrast to that of the local clergy’s preaching.1007 Francis preached, not using “fawning or seductive flattery”, but rather with sharpness, confidence, and power in the Spirit, speaking the truth of the gospel, boldly.1008 Francis’s preaching-style “amazed” people from all ages, genders and all socio-economic levels in the culture.1009 Francis’s words caused people to have a healthy fear in his presence.1010 Francis’s renown spread throughout the region, and it seemed as if society was changing – that the ugliness and darkness that had once prevailed was now being transformed into a “sweet” fragrance, like blossoming flowers.1011 The real outcome that resulted from Francis’s innovative preaching was a sense of dignity, honour, respect and gratefulness, which sprouted quickly “everywhere” from all peoples, whether they were “well-born ... lowly, cleric, or lay”.1012 Francis was considered by many to be powerful and an “outstanding craftsman” when it came to spreading his message among every rank

---

1001 1Cel 1.XV.39, 218.
1002 1Cel 1.XV.39, 218.
1003 1Cel 1.XVIII.47, 224.
1004 1Cel 1.XIV.35, 214.
1005 1Cel 1.XV.36, 214-215.
1006 Cf. LVCC.26, 11.
1007 1Cel 1.XV.36, 215. This aligns with my discussion on the declining reputation of the clergy in chapter five.
1008 1Cel 1.XV.36, 215.
1009 1Cel 1.XV.36-37, 215-216.
1010 1Cel 1.XV.36, 215.
1011 1Cel 1.XV.37, 216.
1012 1Cel 1.XV.37, 216.
of society.\textsuperscript{1013}

Some well-known friars who joined the order because of Francis’s preaching, teaching and simple lifestyle, were Anthony of Lisbon or Padua (1195-1231) and Francis’s appointed minister to the brothers, John of Florence in Provence (France).\textsuperscript{1014} Anthony (born in Portugal) was gifted to “understand the scriptures” and poured forth his knowledge and teachings like that of “milk and honey” to the brothers and to the people.\textsuperscript{1015} On one occasion while Francis was away and Anthony was preaching to the brothers, a respected priest namedMonaldo, who frequently visited the order, had a vision of Francis wherein he was suspended in the air near the door of the house, with his arms spread out as though he were on a cross.\textsuperscript{1016} Monaldo recounting his vision of Francis blessed the brothers greatly.\textsuperscript{1017}

Besides what I have depicted thus far, there are three themes related to Francis’s disposition and outward life that emerge from his story as Thomas recounts it: (1) Francis’s own understanding of and rationale for his ideal of poverty, (2) Francis’s desire to be martyred as the greatest way to incite a movement towards penance and to inspire the church, and (3) Francis’s love and delight in creatures of all sorts. I explore these three themes from Francis’s story below.

**Francis’s Ideal of Poverty**

Francis carefully guarded “Lady Holy Poverty”, which is what he named his ideal of poverty, practising it as the fundamental tenant and governing priority for his life and ministry.\textsuperscript{1018} This concept, for Francis, was not some outward expression, but a thoroughly rooted human, moral virtue which touched and coloured all parts of Francis’s existence.\textsuperscript{1019} Francis kept this ideal of poverty for himself in exaggerated and extreme ways, which helped to assure that he was obeying and imitating Christ.\textsuperscript{1020} For example, Francis rarely ate cooked foods, and when he did, he would “dampen the taste” by sprinkling ashes or cold water on the meat.\textsuperscript{1021} Francis was often invited by

---

\textsuperscript{1013} \textit{ICel} 1.XV.37, 216.

\textsuperscript{1014} \textit{ICel} 1.XVIII.48, 225.

\textsuperscript{1015} \textit{ICel} 1.XVIII.48, 225.

\textsuperscript{1016} \textit{ICel} 1.XVIII.48, 225.

\textsuperscript{1017} \textit{ICel} 1.XVIII.48, 225.

\textsuperscript{1018} \textit{ICel} 1.XIX.52, 227. The concept of “Lady Poverty” has inspired poetry and writings on the subject. See Kenneth Baxter Wolf’s research, which asserts a type of metaphorical marriage of Francis to Lady Poverty in \textit{The Poverty of Riches: St Francis of Assisi Reconsidered} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{1019} Cf. \textit{ICel} 1.XIX.52, 227. Francis, by Thomas’s account, had a sense of what might open a way for sin in his own heart and life. He judged himself accordingly to keep at bay spiritual vices (227).

\textsuperscript{1020} See also, Wolf, 2003, 1-23.

\textsuperscript{1021} \textit{ICel} 1.XIX.51, 227.
great princes of the region to dine with them and to teach them.\textsuperscript{1022} At these dinners, Francis would graciously take a bite of the food placed in front of him, but then put much of it into his lap, only pretending to eat it. He did this so as not to make his hosts feel uncomfortable about his personal commitments to follow Christ.\textsuperscript{1023} Francis also did not indulge in wine in the least, as he barely even drank water when he was overcome by thirst.\textsuperscript{1024}

Francis also preferred the “naked ground” when he slept, and when he was offered hospitality, “he refused to use a straw mattress or blankets”.\textsuperscript{1025} He often slept sitting up and used wood or a stone for a pillow.\textsuperscript{1026} Sometimes Francis was hungry or grew ill and needed to eat, for example, a small amount of cooked chicken.\textsuperscript{1027} After one such time, Francis entered the city gates of Assisi and “commanded” a brother to tie a cord around his neck and drag him through the city exclaiming loudly that Francis was a glutton.\textsuperscript{1028} Such sights and practices caused people in the city to wail and moan and repent of their drunkenness and overindulgence.\textsuperscript{1029} Thomas asserts that Francis acted in these extreme ways to keep himself properly aligned with Christ’s commands and to point people heavenward.\textsuperscript{1030}

Thomas does not leave the reader to wonder why Francis practised such a strict ideal of poverty as he lived out his humility. Francis was greatly honoured by people everywhere he went. These accolades were terrifying to Francis and caused him “great sorrow”.\textsuperscript{1031} In response to a wealth of praise from his followers, or those who listened to his preaching, he would command a brother to hurl insults at him, such as, “Francis, you are a ‘boor and a useless hired-hand’”.\textsuperscript{1032} To these insults, Francis smiled and clapped his hands, exclaiming that these words were exactly “what the son of Pietro Bernardone needs to hear”.\textsuperscript{1033} Francis, argues Thomas, understood his upbringing, his family of origin, his own past and natural penchant for vain self-glory, flamboyance and arrogance.\textsuperscript{1034} Therefore, to moderate himself, Francis went to extreme measures as an example to others of “true confession”.\textsuperscript{1035} Francis was self-aware and openly and unashamedly confessed,
during his preaching, when he did or said “something wrong”. Francis knew himself so well that he tried to “avoid all vanity”, precisely because at heart, Francis wanted it. This was his “model of all kindness and humility”.

Thomas writes a definitive statement outlining Francis’s mindset related to poverty: More than any else [Francis] desired to be set free and to be with Christ. Thus, his chief objective was to live free from all things that are in the world so that his inner serenity would not be disturbed even for a moment by contact with any of its dust. He made himself insensible to all outside noise, gathering his external senses into his inner being and checking the impetus of his spirit, he emptied himself for God alone.

In this regard, Francis asked the rich to give him their garments of fur so that he could, in turn, give them to the poor. He told the rich that he would only accept the garments if they did not expect them to be returned. Francis then distributed these to the first poor people he met on the road and did so with rejoicing and exultation.

Francis’s Desire for Martyrdom

In the sixth year of his conversion, Francis set out on a pilgrimage for martyrdom, taking a ship to Syria so that he could evangelise the Saracens (or Turks). The ship, due to bad weather, did not reach its destination, only making it as far as Slavonia in the northeast (present-day Dalmatia, across the Adriatic Sea). From there, Francis begged some sailors to take him to Ancona (eastern coast of Italy), but they refused him because he had no money. Francis “secretly boarded the ship with a companion”. During the journey, God provided food and necessities for them. A storm came upon the boat and the sailors threw supplies overboard as they fought to keep the ship afloat. Francis’s food was miraculously multiplied, and it supplied everyone, including the sailors until they arrived at Ancona. All those on the ship knew that God had provided through “God’s servant Francis”, and they gave thanks that he had come along on the

---

1Cel 1.XIX.54, 228.
1Cel 1.XIX.54, 229.
1Cel 1.XIX.54, 229.
1Cel 1.XXVII.71, 273.
1Cel 1.XXVIII.76, 247.
1Cel 1.XXVIII.76, 247.
1Cel 1.XXVIII.76, 247.
1Cel 1.XXVIII.76, 247.
1Cel 1.XX.V, 229.
1Cel 1.XX.V, 229.
1Cel 1.XX.V, 229.
1Cel 1.XX.V, 230.
1Cel 1.XX.V, 230.
journey after all.\textsuperscript{1050} From Ancona, Francis travelled the land “towards Morocco” and finally reached Spain. \textsuperscript{1051} However, “God withstood [Francis] to his face” at which point Francis grew sick and had to return home.\textsuperscript{1052}

Finally, in the thirteenth year of Francis’s conversion (c. 1219, during the fifth crusade), he reached Damietta (lower Egypt) and presented himself before Malik (or king) al-Kamil, the sitting sultan.\textsuperscript{1053} Before Francis reached al-Kamil, the Egyptians beat him and threatened him with torture.\textsuperscript{1054} Yet, al-Kamil honoured Francis and offered him gifts and “was moved by [Francis’s] words and listened to him very willingly”.\textsuperscript{1055} The sultan wanted to convert Francis by offering him “worldly riches”, which had no effect on him, and Francis did his best to preach the gospel of Christ to the sultan.\textsuperscript{1056} Both men remained resolved in their respective religions but respected one another.\textsuperscript{1057} Meanwhile, the order of lesser brothers, even in Francis’s absence, continued to increase in numbers across western Europe.\textsuperscript{1058}

\textbf{Francis’s Love of Creatures}

Thomas recounts that as Francis was travelling through the familiar Spoleto Valley, there was a large flock of birds of all varieties, including doves, crows and perhaps magpies.\textsuperscript{1059} When Francis saw this flock, he quickly ran towards them, leaving the other friars on the road.\textsuperscript{1060} These “irrational creatures” allowed Francis to get very close to them—uncommonly close.\textsuperscript{1061} Filled with great joy about this, Francis asked the birds if they would listen and allow him to preach to them.\textsuperscript{1062} Francis then told the birds that they should love God always and give great praise to their

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{1050} \textit{1Cel 1.XX.55}, 230.  \\
\textsuperscript{1051} \textit{1Cel 1.XX.56}, 230.  \\
\textsuperscript{1052} \textit{1Cel 1.XX.56}, 230.  \\
\textsuperscript{1053} \textit{1Cel 1.XX.57}, 231.  \\
\textsuperscript{1054} \textit{1Cel 1.XX.57}, 231.  \\
\textsuperscript{1055} \textit{1Cel 1.XX.57}, 231.  \\
\textsuperscript{1056} \textit{1Cel 1.XX.57}, 231.  \\
\textsuperscript{1057} \textit{1Cel 1.XX.57}, 231. For more on Francis’s visit with the Sultan, see John Tolan, \textit{Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of Christian-Muslim Encounter} (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2009). Francis’s encounter with the Sultan has become the subject of ongoing contemporary research, particularly related to religious diversity, inclusion, and coexistence in the west. Tolan does not attempt to transcribe exactly what was said between Francis and al-Kamil during their meeting but proposes “to examine how the changing portrayals of this event show the evolving fears and hopes inspired by the encounter” (12). However, Tolan acknowledges that since “Francis leaves no one indifferent” perhaps he shed light on “an emblematic encounter or confrontation between East and West” (326-327).  \\
\textsuperscript{1058} \textit{1Cel 1.XXI.58}, 234.  \\
\textsuperscript{1059} \textit{1Cel 1.XXI.58}, 234.  \\
\textsuperscript{1060} \textit{1Cel 1.XXI.58}, 234.  \\
\textsuperscript{1061} \textit{1Cel 1.XXI.58}, 234.  \\
\textsuperscript{1062} \textit{1Cel 1.XXI.58}, 234.  \\
\end{flushright}
The birds, upon hearing Francis’s words, rejoiced by stretching their necks, flapping their wings and looking intently at Francis.¹⁰⁶³

After that occurrence, Francis made it a part of his daily routine to address the birds and all other creatures, including the reptiles and insensible animals.¹⁰⁶⁵ A well-known scene is when Francis was in a village called Alviano (southwest of Assisi) preaching the word of God and the birds there were chirping and shrieking so loudly that no one could hear Francis.¹⁰⁶⁶ Francis called the swallows his sisters and asked them for the chance to speak.¹⁰⁶⁷ The birds immediately fell silent and allowed the holy man to give his sermon.¹⁰⁶⁸ The people who saw this were “filled with great wonder”.¹⁰⁶⁹ These sorts of occurrences with animals extended to the fish of the sea.¹⁰⁷⁰ If a fish was caught alive, Francis would throw the fish back into the water, exhorting it to be careful not to be caught again.¹⁰⁷¹ Once on the Lake of Rieti, a fisherman caught a “tinca” and gave it to Francis.¹⁰⁷² Francis greeted it and put it back in the water.¹⁰⁷³ The fish stayed by the boat until Francis permitted it to leave.¹⁰⁷⁴ Francis’s fondness was towards all animals and all of creation, but he especially loved lambs.¹⁰⁷⁵ Once, Francis came across a man who was walking with two lambs tied and strapped to his back.¹⁰⁷⁶ The lambs were crying, and Francis approached them like a mother and asked the man: “Why are you torturing my brother lambs?”¹⁰⁷⁷ The man said that he was taking them into town to sell.¹⁰⁷⁸ Francis asked what would happen to them.¹⁰⁷⁹ The man replied that they would be killed and eaten.¹⁰⁸⁰ Francis said: “No, this must not happen! Here, take my cloak as payment and give me the lambs.”¹⁰⁸¹

¹⁰⁶³ 1Cel 1.XXI.58, 234.
¹⁰⁶⁴ 1Cel 1.XXI.58, 234.
¹⁰⁶⁵ 1Cel 1.XXI.58, 234.
¹⁰⁶⁶ 1Cel 1.XXI.59, 235.
¹⁰⁶⁷ 1Cel 1.XXI.59, 235.
¹⁰⁶⁸ 1Cel 1.XXI.59, 235.
¹⁰⁶⁹ 1Cel 1.XXI.59, 235.
¹⁰⁷⁰ 1Cel 1.XXI.61, 235.
¹⁰⁷¹ 1Cel 1.XXI.61, 235.
¹⁰⁷² 1Cel 1.XXI.61, 235.
¹⁰⁷³ 1Cel 1.XXI.61, 235.
¹⁰⁷⁴ 1Cel 1.XXI.61, 235.
¹⁰⁷⁵ 1Cel 1.XXI.61, 235.
¹⁰⁷⁶ 1Cel 1.XXI.79, 249. These included rabbits and worms for whom he had a “warm love” (Cf. 1Cel 1.XXII.60, 235 & 1Cel 1.XXIII.80, 250). Francis delighted in the beauty of flowers, especially the joy of their “sweet fragrance” (1Cel 1.XXIII.81).
¹⁰⁷⁷ 1Cel 1.XXVIII.79, 249.
¹⁰⁷⁸ 1Cel 1.XXVIII.79, 249.
¹⁰⁷⁹ 1Cel 1.XXVIII.79, 249.
¹⁰⁸⁰ 1Cel 1.XXVIII.79, 249.
¹⁰⁸¹ 1Cel 1.XXVIII.79, 249.
At the end of Book One of the *Vita Prima*, Thomas tells how Francis re-enacts the first Christmas nativity by dressing in the vestments of a Levite (or a deacon of the church) and then affectionately recounting the story of the baby Christ. Thomas ends the book with this beloved scene writing: “Here ends the first book of the life and deeds of blessed Francis.” Book Two opens with Thomas stating that Book One comprised the first eighteen years of Francis’s conversion but now he would turn to a “brief account of [Francis’s] remaining deeds, beginning with the next to last year of his life”. Thomas asserts that he hopes to focus on events in Francis’s last two years of life on earth that seemed “more important”. Then, Thomas gives the date of Francis’s death as 4 October, 1226. However, before I use the *Vita Prima* to recount Francis’s final two years leading up to his death, I delineate some of the events that took place between the years 1220 – 1223, which are not included in Thomas’s narrative.

**Administrative Challenges**

By the year 1217, the friars had spread beyond Italy and across Europe into countries like France, England, Germany and Hungary, and each “chapter” (or local group) was assigned a leader who was answerable to Francis. Francis’s mission had crossed geographical and cultural borders. With this growth, Francis had new challenges when it came to administering and organising such a diverse group. Daily tasks ranged from the monumental to the mundane. With these challenges and day-to-day issues among the growing numbers of global friars, including Francis’s ailing health, he asked Pope Honorius III (and “the whole Roman Curia”) for help to manage

---


1083 *1Cel 1.XXX.87*, 257.

1084 *1Cel 2.188*, 258.

1085 *1Cel 2.188*, 258.

1086 In modern times, 4 October is considered the annual feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi. See, for example *The Roman Missal*, 3rd ed., English ed. (Chicago: Liturgical Training Press, 2011), 966ff.

1087 Deane, 2011, 126. There is debate as to the exact nature and number of the order’s expansion beyond Italy by 1217. Manselli makes a good, historical case for these countries that I have listed (1988, 199-206).

1088 Thompson, 2013, 92.

1089 Thompson, 2013, 92.

1090 Thompson, 2013, 92. During Francis’s absences seeking martyrdom, the order overall became less confident perhaps and would give in to criticisms. Francis was not bothered by the piety of restriction, but rather the fact that such dietary restrictions, as he understood them, were not explicit in scripture. For example, upon returning from the Middle East in 1220, Francis realised that the brothers had begun dietary practices in keeping with a presiding “devout laity” (92).
the order in 1219.\footnote{1Cel 2.V.99, 267.} To Francis’s request, the pope assigned cardinal Ugolino (or Hugolino) as the order’s protector and Francis’s personal vicar.\footnote{1Cel 2.V.99-100, 267ff. Ugolino, by Thomas’s account, loved Francis and sought to serve him in many ways, including when Francis’s eyesight was fading – Ugolino looked for remedies and cures (cf. 1Cel 2.V.101, 271).} Ugolino gave Francis and the order the aid that they needed, but one important thing that he helped to clear up was a misunderstanding concerning what to do with “acquired” property that had been given to the order while Francis was away in Egypt meeting with the sultan.\footnote{Deane, 2011, 126.} When Francis finally returned home to Italy from the Middle East (in 1220), he was sick from malaria and perhaps carrying a variety of other infections.\footnote{Thompson, 2013, 91.} From this time forward, Francis remained progressively ill until his death.\footnote{Thompson, 2013, 91.} However, before his death, Francis and the friars had one final, but monumental task ahead of them – that of writing an official rule that would allow the order to continue as an official religious order of the church after Francis was gone.

**Resignation as Minister General**

As previously discussed in chapter five, Lateran IV rulings, under Pope Innocent III, delineated that any new religious order had to have an approved and sanctioned rule for their daily practices (i.e., that of Augustine or Benedict).\footnote{LIVCC.13, 9.} Although Innocent had approved the work and mission of the lesser brothers in 1209, there was no official written rule.\footnote{Cf. 1Cel 1.XIII.32, 210.} In this regard, some scholars assert that there was only a verbal confirmation or that there was perhaps a brief written text (called the *forma vitae* or proto-rule) which is not extant if it existed at all.\footnote{Roberto Rusconi, *Francis of Assisi, in the Sources and the Writings* (New York: Franciscan Publications, 2008), 26ff. Although Thomas entitles Chapter XIII, “How [Francis] First Wrote a Rule ...” there is considerable debate about whether this proto-rule existed in written form or was only verbally discharged by Innocent III to Francis and the first twelve followers. It is beyond the scope to enter these debates here. Rusconi writes that either way the rule and life of the brothers was “‘to live in obedience, in chastity, and without anything of their own,’ and to follow the teaching and footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ ...” (26).} However, on 29 May 1220 in a papal letter, Pope Honorius III directly called Francis’s international “movement” of friars, an *ordo* (a religious order), which was good news but meant that the friars needed to choose or write a rule immediately that the church magisterium could approve.\footnote{Thompson, 2013, 92.}

As the year progressed, a second papal letter was written in which Honorius III declared that new members to the lesser brothers could only join with a standard year-long “novitiate” or a...
canonical probationary period. Honorius III signed the Cum Secundum Consilium at Orvieto on 22 September 1220. In the past, leadership for the order was simple, and Francis had been the predominant overseer who approved all new members into the friars. This new papal demand for a waiting period for members seemed like a “reversal” of Francis’s own early admissions policy for the order. Amid these letters and changes, Ugolino introduced Francis to various cardinals of the Roman Curia. Ugolino hoped to ease the challenges of the order’s institutionalisation - setting into motion the process that would take the lesser brothers from a budding movement to an official religious order of the church, an “institutional evolution” of sorts.

As mentioned previously, the friars had increased in number and Francis became encumbered by a medley of developments and difficulties that faced the order after a decade of ministry and missionary fervour in Europe. Once the movement had spread over “every part of the Italian peninsula”, more structure and oversight were needed, which became impossible for one person to manage on their own. In light of this, on 29 September 1220, at the Feast of Saint Michael, the Archangel, Francis “dropped a bombshell” on the brothers and resigned as Minister General, or leader of the order, appointing Peter Caetani as his successor and the new official head. However, Francis remained “very present and visible” following his resignation.

**Writing the Rules**

Writing an official rule as Lateran IV required would not prove easy for the order. For one, Francis emphatically rejected the Rules of Augustine, Benedict, and Bernard of Clairvaux, insisting that his call was a unique form of life. By the winter of 1220-1221, Minister General or not, Francis and the lesser brothers were faced with the inevitable task of writing a rule that was to be submitted for papal approval. Finally, the required document, called the *Regula non-bullata*

---

1100 Thompson, 2013, 97.
1101 Rusconi, 2008, 43.
1102 Thompson, 2013, 97.
1103 Thompson, 2013, 97.
1104 Thompson, 2013, 97-98.
1105 Thompson, 2013, 93.
1106 Thompson, 2013, 93.
1107 Deane, 2011, 124.
1109 Thompson, 2013, 101.
1110 Cf. Thompson, 2013, 117ff.
1111 Vauchez, 2012, 104.
1112 Rusconi, 2008, 45.
(1221) or the first Rule (sine bulla) was ready and comprised of twenty-three chapters.\textsuperscript{1113} In this text, Francis and the brothers reiterated their ideal of poverty through a “mélange of exhortations, spiritual reflections and norms of behavior, enriched by numerous biblical citations”.\textsuperscript{1114} However, this Rule of 1221 was not approved.\textsuperscript{1115} In the meantime, only one year into his leadership of the brothers, Peter Caetani died and brother Elias of Assisi succeeded him on 10 March 1221.\textsuperscript{1116}

With the involvement and help of Elias and Ugolino, a revision of the first Rule of 1221 was introduced in 1223.\textsuperscript{1117} This Regula bullata gained church approval as a shorter and polished version of the earlier 1221 Rule.\textsuperscript{1118} Rusconi writes that “the papal letter of Pope Honorius III, Solet annuere, was dated 29 November 1223, in the Lateran palace and it formally approved the Rule of 1223 of the friars”.\textsuperscript{1119} It is this Rule that remains the official rule of the order today.\textsuperscript{1120} The Regula bullata, which is composed of twelve chapters, fits onto one parchment and is currently preserved at the Sacro Convento in Assisi.\textsuperscript{1121}

The Rule of 1223 required would-be friars to, among other things, “wear poor clothes”, to receive “no coins or money in any form” and to make no house of any kind, committing themselves to a life of poverty, humility and simplicity—serving the poor and preaching repentance in a literal attempt to follow the example of Christ.\textsuperscript{1122} Having resigned as Minister General three years previously, once the Rule passed in 1223, Francis returned to his original mission by practising his ideal of poverty and preaching to and living among the abject poor of society as ways to inspire renewal in the church.\textsuperscript{1123} However, because of Francis’s continued illnesses, notably “the quartan fever and ... near-blindness”, he was limited in his mobility and “needed continual help and companionship”.\textsuperscript{1124} During these years, Thomas recounts that Francis performed miracles and

\begin{footnotes}
\item Rusconi, 2008, 46. It was termed “non bullata” because it lacked approval by a papal letter with a lead ‘bull’ or seal hanging from it (46). Short remarks that the earlier Rule of 1221 had a foreboding twenty-two chapters (2011, 54).
\item Vauchez, 2012, 104.
\item Rusconi, 2008, 57-58.
\item Vauchez, 2012, 104-105.
\item Rusconi, 2008, 57-58.
\item Vauchez, 2012, 105.
\item Rusconi, 2008, 58.
\item Rusconi, 2008, 59-60.
\item Manselli, 1988, 287.
\item Manselli, 1988, 287.
\end{footnotes}
healings, such as the time he healed a lame man at Toscanella (south of Bologna) and then a paralysed man at Narni (in the Umbrian hill country).\footnote{Vauchez, 2012, 127ff.}

**Stigmata, Writings, & Final Testament**

In his final years, in a well-known scene, Francis, with a few companions (c. September 1224) departed to La Verna, a wilderness area in Tuscany with twisted rocks and solitary woods “in the heart of a mountainous plateau which rises to more than four thousand feet”.\footnote{Vauchez, 2012, 130. It is beyond the scope to give attention to Francis’s stigmata and the growing scepticism and debate surrounding it since roughly 1993 as “some scholars began to challenge the ‘reality’ of the wounds of Francis, advancing the opinion that they were, for the most part, a theological concoction of Bonaventure…” See Jacques Dalarun, Michael F. Cusato, and Carla Salvati, eds., *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi – New Studies, New Perspectives* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2006), 7. These critical essays help to provide a contemporary reading of the stigmata with meaning for today’s world.} It was at La Verna that Francis saw a flying seraph, a “vision” of a man with six wings standing over him, whose arms were extended with his feet joined and affixed to a cross.\footnote{Vauchez, 2012, 127ff.} It is contested as to all of the events that took place at La Verna, but some believe this is where Francis received the stigmata as he became “united to Christ crucified” through his own personal passion.\footnote{Vauchez, 2012, 130.} Thomas notes that there are some in this life who seek the lower or level paths, others, like Francis, seek to “climb to the summit of the mountain”.\footnote{Vauchez, 2012, 130.} Thus, “the venerable father was in fact marked in five parts of his body with the marks of the passion of the cross, as if he had hung on the cross with the Son of God”.\footnote{Vauchez, 2012, 131.} Although Francis did not show these visible marks to many people, brother Elias was blessed to see them on Francis’s side.\footnote{Cf. 1Cel 1.IX.112ff, 279ff.} Others saw the marks of Christ’s passion on Francis’s body at his death.\footnote{Vauchez, 2012, 131.}

Not long after the appearance of the stigmata, some scholars contend that Francis wrote his most famous writings, *The Canticle of the Sun*, or *The Canticle of the Creatures* (c. December 1224-February 1225), followed by his *Testament* (May or June 1226). In the *Canticle*, Francis gives praise to God for all creation and calls fire “his brother” and water “his sister”.\footnote{1Cel 2.II.95, 264.} In Francis’s *Testament*, he reiterates his life’s mission and desire to obey and imitate Christ for the renewal and growth of the church.\footnote{1Cel 2.IV.97-98, 266-267.} Francis’s health was in rapid decline and his eyesight was also failing.\footnote{1Cel 2.IV.97-98, 266-267.} In this

---

\footnote{Cf. 1Cel 1.XXIII.65ff, 239ff. Also, he healed sicknesses and cast out demons (cf. 1Cel 1.XXV.68ff, 241ff).}
regard, some sought to provide remedies for Francis through medicines which Francis initially rejected.\textsuperscript{1136} Elias told Francis that God had created medicine from the earth for the good of man. Francis then rejoiced and “humbly accepted [Elias’s] direction”.\textsuperscript{1137} Francis was in such poor physical condition that he had to be led on a donkey throughout neighbouring towns to preach and visit people.\textsuperscript{1138} Many of the brothers looked after and care for Francis, “the blessed father”, in these last two years of his life whilst he battled illness and eye troubles.

**Francis’s Death**

After long-term physical illnesses and near blindness, Francis died with his brothers around him in 1226. Thomas writes that “twenty years had passed since his conversion and his time was ending”.\textsuperscript{1139} In mid-September of 1226, Francis asked to be taken to the church of Saint Mary of the Little Portion (Portiuncula).\textsuperscript{1140} He also requested that the gospels be brought in and read to him (according to John).\textsuperscript{1141} A death watch ensued and Francis spent the week putting his “affairs in order”.\textsuperscript{1142} Francis was in a great deal of pain and awoke thinking the day to be Thursday, which it was not.\textsuperscript{1143} Yet, because Jesus took the last supper and instituted the Eucharist on a Thursday, Francis thought that Thursday was also a good day to depart from his brothers.\textsuperscript{1144}

So, one by one, beginning with Elias, Francis blessed them all.\textsuperscript{1145} Francis called to mind those brothers who were absent and blessed those who would later join the lesser brothers.\textsuperscript{1146} This was Francis’s last supper.\textsuperscript{1147} Thomas recounts that one of the brothers saw “the soul of the most holy father … rise straight to heaven … like a star but as big as the moon, with the brilliance of the sun”.\textsuperscript{1148} On the day of Francis’s death, a great flock of larks (Francis’s favourite bird) circled Francis’s cell singing praises to God as “the choir office” and that same night, Francis died.\textsuperscript{1149} The brothers mourned Francis’s passing by doing vigil over his body which had become “beautiful” to them, “white in its beauty”.\textsuperscript{1150} After which many local people saw Francis’s body, his face “glowing with

\textsuperscript{1136} \textit{1Cel} 2.IV.98, 267.  
\textsuperscript{1137} \textit{1Cel} 2.IV.98, 266.  
\textsuperscript{1138} \textit{1Cel} 2.IV.98, 267.  
\textsuperscript{1139} \textit{1Cel} 2.VIII.109, 277.  
\textsuperscript{1140} Thompson, 2013, 176. Also, \textit{1Cel} 2.VII.105, 274.  
\textsuperscript{1141} \textit{1Cel} 2.VIII.110, 278.  
\textsuperscript{1142} Thompson, 2013, 176.  
\textsuperscript{1143} Thompson, 2013, 178.  
\textsuperscript{1144} Thompson, 2013, 178.  
\textsuperscript{1145} Thompson, 2013, 178.  
\textsuperscript{1146} Thompson, 2013, 178.  
\textsuperscript{1147} \textit{1Cel} 3.126, 297. See also, Thompson, 2013, 178.  
\textsuperscript{1148} \textit{1Cel} 2.VIII.110, 278.  
\textsuperscript{1149} Thompson, 2013, 178. Cf. \textit{1Cel} 2.I.88, 258. Thomas notes the date as 4 October 1226.  
\textsuperscript{1150} \textit{1Cel} 2.IX.112, 280.
remarkable beauty” and the wounds of his stigmata were visible and announced to the world.\textsuperscript{1151} The people would kiss the sacred marks as well, seeing this as a rare blessing to them.\textsuperscript{1152} It was in these moments of the immediacy after his death that Francis’s body “had both the image and the form of the Seraph ... remaining on the cross”.\textsuperscript{1153} Thomas closes Book Two of the \textit{Vita Prima} with the groaning and weeping of the ladies of Saint Damian, who were joined by “The Lady Clare”.\textsuperscript{1154}

**Francis’s Canonisation**

Francis was canonised as a saint in 1228, “in the second year of the pontificate of the Lord Pope Gregory IX, on the seventeenth day of the calends of the month of August”.\textsuperscript{1155} Thomas’s Book Three gives a detailed accounting of this auspicious day in the life of the Medieval church.\textsuperscript{1156} Thomas was an eyewitness to this day and recounts the event as a reporter. Among those in attendance were the King of France (Louis VII who died that same year), the German Emperor (Frederick II) and Pope Gregory IX, those “from North, South, East and West”—people from all walks of life and leaders in the church from cardinal to lower-ranking clergy.\textsuperscript{1157} It was said that Gregory IX preached “to all the people with deeply felt words sweeter than honey, proclaiming the praises of God in a resonant voice”.\textsuperscript{1158} From the lofty place of preaching, Gregory IX descended, prayed, and “with his blessed lips kissed the tomb holding the sacred body [of Francis] dedicated to God”.\textsuperscript{1159}
Chapter 7: Francis’s Humility & Lifelong Learning

Francis’s Troublesome Humility

In the previous chapter, I depicted Francis of Assisi’s biography as it is recounted by Thomas of Celano in the *Vita Prima*. I used secondary scholarship to fill gaps in Francis’s story and timeline. In light of Francis’s biography, one fundamental concern and two other potentially damaging or troubling issues arise which cast doubt upon whether he is a positive and life-affirming example of humility. The fundamental concern is that Francis practised and seemed to welcome extreme forms of self-abasement, which make him out to be the epitome of the outdated and dangerous sort of Christian humility that Hume, Kant and Nietzsche argued against in the modern era (discussed in chapter two). Then, on the basis of what some modern scholars have argued (which I elucidate in detail below), Francis’s humble example is further complicated and perhaps compromised by his alleged unwavering stance against learning and the need for theological education or training for some within his order. Such a stance makes Francis seem like an unyielding leader, who is unaware of the times and one who seems incapable of making needed and helpful changes and improvements for the good of his order.

Lastly, in the period leading up to the approval of the *Rule* of 1223, certain scholars have contended that Francis was in conflict with some in the order and in the church magisterium over how his original ideal of poverty would be reflected in the official *Rule* going forward after his death. Consequently, Francis’s *Testament* that he wrote near the end of his life, in 1226, has been interpreted as his final attempt to be heard, insisting upon his ideal of poverty and the original vision he had for the order in those early years prior to and leading up to 1209. Such attitudes and this apparent pursuit of a personal agenda are dispositions that help to depict Francis as stubborn, perhaps even prideful, and intent on getting his own way regardless of how it might affect the future of the lesser brothers as an official religious order that could bring about needed reforms for the ailing church of his day.

Reconsidering Francis’s Humility

Using Contemporary Scholarship

In this chapter, I seek to reconsider these controversies first, by exploring alternative interpretations found in contemporary Franciscan scholarship and then second, by invoking the lifelong learning theory as a lens through which to view these problematic instances of Francis’s humility in a different way. To this end, I start by examining Francis’s self-abasing behaviours in comparison to similar practices of poverty that were taking place in his cultural context of the thirteenth century by other popular religious groups and their movements, including those of the
Dominicans. Although Francis’s actions and practices might appear extreme to those in a contemporary context, I show that they represent a successful attempt to counteract, not only the indulgent and materialistic culture of the times, but also to help repair the tattered reputation of the church as a way to draw back the faithful.

Then, to add support to this argument, I underscore how Thomas of Celano describes Francis’s self-understanding related to his upbringing and the frivolities and material excesses that characterised his youth as a merchant’s son in Assisi but that remained temptations for him up until he died. Thomas’s commentary helps to explain that Francis’s personal practices of self-abasement were his own and a way that Francis attempted to live out faithfully his commitment to follow Christ. For these reasons, I conclude that Francis’s self-abasing behaviours represent a successful and relevant strategy for him to emulate the life of Christ, radically influence the cultural context of his day, and safeguard the ideal of poverty as he understood it for himself, and as he sought to practise it as an example for the order and the wider church context which was full of disillusioned and distrusting members who needed inspiration.

From here, I analyse the other controversies surrounding Francis’s erratic behaviours and seemingly stubborn attitudes during the period of roughly 1220-1223 with the writing of the Rules, followed by his presumed cryptic meaning and intentions behind writing his Testament in 1226. I begin this part of the discussion by describing the difficult but necessary shifts in Francis’s understanding and stance on learning as he adapted his thinking to formulate new strategies regarding the growing need for training and theological education for some within the order. In light of this, I turn to argue, with the support of contemporary research, that Francis did, in fact, accept the changes which had to take place regarding learning and his original ideal of poverty, and adjusted his views to fit with the times, assuring the successful continuance of the lesser brothers after his death. Broadly speaking, I conclude from this examination that although it was not an easy transition for Francis when the order went through the pangs of institutionalisation, he ultimately let go of his original ideal of poverty as he had envisioned it earlier on for the order, entrusting to Christ’s care all the unforeseeable outcomes that this relinquishment would entail after he died.

Note that my method for organising this part of the chapter is to start by elucidating the details of what I am calling the traditional interpretation about Francis (drawn from scholarship over roughly the last century) regarding his stance on learning and theological education, his behaviours and attitudes during the writing of the Rules, and lastly his motivations for writing the Testament. After delineating the traditional understanding of Francis as it relates to each of these case studies in question, I provide, using more recent research, an alternative or counter-narrative to the traditional one which helps to reframe and reinterpret Francis’s humility in relation to these troubling cases.
Then, drawing upon these sorts of alternative findings, I turn to the culmination of my argument in this chapter, which is to show that Francis lived and practised his humility in ways that are commensurate with the lifelong learning theory and traits of a lifelong learner.

**Using Lifelong Learning**

Thus, in the final, main section of the chapter, I draw together the alternative or counter interpretations about Francis from contemporary scholarship before linking them to the concepts of lifelong learning. I contend that Francis was open and flexible regarding changes and needed improvements for the life and daily practices of the order. He was self-aware when it came to knowing when he needed help, and he was willing, by God’s grace, to adapt his thinking and lifestyle, not only to follow Christ’s example but to live in such a way as to influence and counter the culture in his day. For these and other reasons, I conclude that Francis is a lifelong learner and, as such, is a good and life-affirming model of Christian humility. In the final chapter of the thesis, I argue that Christian humility conceived in terms of the lifelong learning theory not only resolves the modern critiques and helps to cast Francis’s humility in a positive and life-affirming light, but it also provides an alternative to a popular, but as I show, problematic type of leadership found in the modern church context, called servant leadership.

**Francis’s Self-Abasing Behaviours**

**Recap**

Based on his biography that I provided in the previous chapter, the fact that Francis practised self-abasement is not difficult to establish. These behaviours alone make his humility vulnerable to the modern critiques of Christian humility. By way of introduction, before I show another way to view Francis’s behaviours in this regard, I refer back to a few examples. Shortly after his conversion, Thomas underscores how Francis’s clothing changed from the “flowing garments” of a merchant’s son to the distinctive and coarse clothing of a hermit’s tunic, belt, staff and plain shoes. Francis sought to wear clothes that were unenviable even to the lowest of peasants living in his day.

This meagre way that Francis adorned the outside of his body was matched by what Francis put into his body. Francis restricted his diet by fasting, but then ate foods that were unpleasant to him. Sometimes after eating cooked chicken, Francis commanded a brother to tie a rope around his neck and drag him through the city and exclaim loudly that he was a glutton. When he received praise or accolades from others, Francis instructed fellow brothers to hurl insults at him and call him

---

1160 *I Cel. I.X.21*, 201.
1161 *I Cel. I.XIX.52*, 228.
a “boor and a useless hired-hand”. He also preferred the deprivation of the “naked ground” on which to sleep, instead of a bed. He refused to use any sort of straw mattress or blankets – often sleeping while he sat up or using a stone or piece of wood in the place of a pillow. All of these self-abasing practices might be summarised by the word “lesser”, which Francis chose as a way to describe his order and the ideal of poverty that established it upon the “rock of humility”. In the next section, I argue that there is a different way to view Francis’s self-abasing actions which makes him less susceptible to the modern critiques.

A Counter-Cultural Example

Strategic — Following Similar Practices of the Day

As previously explained in the historical context chapter, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in western Europe marked an extremely tumultuous period and the church was losing members for various reasons. For example, as I showed, some had become disenchanted and disillusioned with the official church because of the rampant moral and material corruption of the papacy and its clergy. These internal disparities and the division and tensions that they created amongst the general laity should not be understated. Perhaps a useful depiction that helps to capture the overall reputation of the church at the time in relation to its declining and disheartened membership comes from a famous French satirist of the day, John of Salisbury (1110-1180) who became the bishop of Chartres in 1179. In the *Policraticus* (*P*, circa 1159), John writes that the Roman Church is “the mother of all churches” but acts like a “steppmother” who places “insupportable burdens” on the shoulders of her people and is unwilling to get her fingers dirty to help them. They pile up gold and silver and accumulate “valuable furnishings”. The “palaces of priests glitter” and their vestments are not only purple but “gilded” or covered in gold. The official church, which was supposed to be “the brightest light of the world” was viewed with suspicion and distain because it seemed to enjoy receiving presents and chasing after payments.

---

1162 1Cel 1.XIX.53, 228.
1163 1Cel 1.XIX.53, 228.
1164 1Cel 1.XIX.51, 227.
1165 1Cel 1.XV.38, 217.
1167 Jean de Salisbury, *Policraticus: of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers* (*P*), ed. and trans., Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), Book VI, 133. John’s critique of the church is scathing and shocking (perhaps the way satire should be). He writes that the church curia frequently harms and “imitates demons” by erecting palaces and neglecting altars (133). Thus, Francis and the order were facing a populace that viewed the church in some regards as demonic, neglectful and ostentatious. To offset such cultural attitudes and underpinnings would take a variety of extreme measures.
1168 P VI, 133.
1169 P VI, 133.
while “exhausting the wallets of others in order to make their own more dense”.\textsuperscript{1170} Popular opinion was that the church magisterium “preached words of poverty but rushed toward riches in criminal ways, … pretending humility so that they may advertise their pride”.\textsuperscript{1171} Although these sorts of renderings are satirical and meant to be hyperbolic, John helps to reflect the general beliefs and attitudes of many towards the papacy and much of the local clergy leading up to and during the time of Francis and the start of his order.\textsuperscript{1172}

Moreover, others were drawn away from the church because of intellectual ineptness displayed by the clergy in comparison to those who were better trained and able to debate current and relevant issues coming out of the new universities like in Paris and Bologna. Thus, in reaction to all of these inconsistencies and failures that were damaging the church’s reputation in the eyes of the wider culture, unsanctioned religious groups and movements, such as the Cathars and Waldensians became almost immediately attractive, popular and quite successful. Their lifestyles and message resonated with average, common people by abandoning the pompous practices and immorality of the church in favour of an apostolic sort of poverty, teaching, moral purity, and what appeared to be ardent pastoral care for the masses – all of which were lacking in the ministry of the church at the time.

Because of the increasing notoriety of these groups and religious movements, when Francis appeared on the scene practising his unique and personal form of Christlike poverty by owning nothing, relying on God and others for his daily subsistence, while also rebuilding cathedral churches that were in disrepair (during his early years of conversion), he was almost immediately a sensation. Not to mention that Francis and the order of lesser brothers were sanctioned by the church (1209) and not part of some sort of anti-clergy campaign. If medieval historians are close to accurate in their assessments and the satirists, like John of Salisbury, are even partially bearing the truth of the matter, then what might seem like extreme behaviours on the part of Francis are merely what is required by anyone who wishes to make a difference in that cultural milieu. Thus, I contend that Francis’s actions, including self-abasement, his wearing of simple clothing and the extreme behaviours all seem more than fitting, given his cultural context because they provide a needed strategic and stark contrast that helped him effectively start an order and win people to Christ, while at the same time bring renewal and reform that rehabilitated the reputation of the struggling church. As Manselli views it, Francis understood from the beginning that:

A choice had to be made that was not theological or juridical, but personal and social. It is also true that [Francis] regarded himself and his friars as engaged not in the social uplifting

\textsuperscript{1170} PV VI, 198.
\textsuperscript{1171} PV VI, 198.
\textsuperscript{1172} Cf. Southern, 1953, 153-154.
of the masses, but in the need to restore to them their dignity as the children of God and as beloved in Christ, who had deliberately chosen to be like them - a poor worker who ended up crucified – and not like the powerful on earth.\textsuperscript{1173} Moreover, the Dominican order, which started around the same time as the lesser brothers, practised similar self-abasing behaviours, such as dressing like the poor and taking a vow of apostolic poverty. I elucidated how Dominic and his companions discovered that this seemed to be the only effective way to draw the masses in to hear their message (to counteract the false teachings of the Cathars in Paris). Like the notable religious groups and movements already mentioned, the Dominicans used what seemed like a drastic approach that was actually appropriate and effective at drawing the faithful back to the church. Rather than wearing papal regalia that typically deterred and distracted people from listening to them, Dominic and his companions dressed like the abject poor, which helped to remove social and cultural barriers that were keeping people away and uninterested in the gospel that they were proclaiming. These methods were necessary and successful for both the Dominicans and the Franciscans. Dominic and his companions sought to teach and live in ways that reflected the lives of “the apostles”, while Francis and the lesser brothers preached and lived accordingly, in “Christ’s way”.\textsuperscript{1174} Thus, Francis’s practices find precedent in his day as a contextualised and creatively adaptive way to combat heresy and to influence the disillusioned masses, calling them to return to the church.

**Personal — Showing his Commitment to Follow Christ**

Thomas of Celano’s *Vita Prima* includes his commentary and explanations about many aspects of Francis’s life, the order and the cultural context in which Francis and his followers lived and ministered. Thomas seems to anticipate the questions and possible concerns that readers might have about Francis’s thinking and perplexing practices. Francis wanted to follow all that Jesus commanded in the gospels “to the letter” and wearing the “simplest” thing possible seemed to accomplish that for him.\textsuperscript{1175} However, Thomas argues that Francis’s simple clothing represented not only a way to emulate and exemplify the teachings of Christ, but also proved an effective way to remove outward distractions, which resulted in drawing people to the gospel message that he preached.\textsuperscript{1176} Thomas argues that the moniker of “lesser” was an apt descriptor for the order in the early days because it guided the brothers’ thinking about who they were as a “devout company” that fostered love for one another in a spirit of modesty and peacefulness.\textsuperscript{1177} Thomas asserts that

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1173] Manselli, 1988, 283.
\item[1174] Manselli, 1988, 75.
\item[1175] 1Cel 1.IX.22, 202.
\item[1176] 1Cel 1.IX.22, 202.
\item[1177] 1Cel 1.XV.40, 219.
\end{footnotes}
the lesser brothers were not easily upset with hardships or material lackings, as this kept them open, flexible and free from internal and external scandal. Thus, this notion of lesser was a creative and innovative way to help members of the order keep “their minds set on heaven” which allowed them to have praise, respect and a deep trust in one another that also extended to all outsiders. All of this meant great harmony and a constant calm for the fledgling company, which carried the company to other places in western Europe.

Perhaps most poignantly, Thomas gives the rationale for Francis’s extreme personal self-abasing behaviours. Thomas argues that these practices helped Francis stay aligned with Christ’s example and the ideal of poverty that he had called Francis to live out as an example to the world in his day. Thomas asserts that oftentimes people greatly honoured and almost venerated Francis wherever he went, and such accolades terrified Francis and gave him “great sorrow”. Thomas contends that Francis understood himself with a deep self-awareness, which included an understanding of his extravagant upbringing and family of origin and his natural penchant for vain self-glory, flamboyance and arrogance. In light of these self-understandings, Francis sought to moderate himself, going to extremes if necessary, as a way to exemplify the act of “true confession” in his cultural context of religious laxity.

Francis was self-aware to the point that he wanted to “avoid all vanity”, because at heart, he knew that his old, default frame of reference drew him away from Christ to instead pursue the fleeting things of the world as he had done in his youthful days when he wore “flowing garments” and lived an arrogant and frivolous life. In these ways, Francis acted as a “model of all kindness and humility”, which drew others to him and helped to reform and renew the church. Francis was enabled by the love of Christ to exchange and displace the old frames of reference, drawn from his youth and family of origin, in exchange for newer more reliable ones, which served and transformed him and allowed him to influence others for the good of his mission.

---

1178 Cf. 1Cel 15.40, 219-220.
1179 1Cel 15.40, 219-220.
1180 1Cel 1.XIX.52, 228. Francis’s alignment with Christ’s incarnational poverty exemplified through his renunciation of material and spiritual wealth is supported in later Franciscan tradition which I discuss in greater detail below. See, for example, Bonaventure, in Works of Bonaventure, Defense of the Mendicants, trans. José de Vinck and Robert J. Karris, O.M.F. (Saint Bonaventure NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2010).
1181 1Cel 1.XIX.53, 228.
1182 Cf. 1Cel 1.XIX.53, 228.
1183 1Cel 1.XIX.54, 228.
1184 1Cel 1.XIX.54, 229.
1185 1Cel 1.XIX.54, 229.
1186 1Cel 1.XIX.54, 229.
Thus, Francis’s self-abasing acts were a means to an end and not an end in themselves. That end for Francis was to follow the example of Christ at all costs – as he understood it for himself and as it allowed him to fulfill the purpose to which God had called him. Francis was willing, much like Christ in his incarnation, to condescend into poverty from his previous prestigious state as his way to then pour out love on all of creation around him. Later Franciscan tradition underscores that Francis was in step with Christ, the “origin of all good things and the foundation and founder” who embraced with the greatest affection the opposite of ... avarice, advocating it by his example and preaching it by his word.\textsuperscript{1187} Christ condescended to his weak and imperfect members of this world from the height of his most perfect love.\textsuperscript{1188} He assumed human nature so that in this humble state he was able “to perform certain deeds” of a supreme love.\textsuperscript{1189} Since “Christ was poor at birth, poor during the course of his life, and poor at death”, so Francis sought to be a perfect “imitator” of this holiness as “the most secure way of being conformed to Christ crucified”.\textsuperscript{1190} For Francis, Christ provided the ultimate example of humility for his followers as he “abandoned” the allure of both spiritual and material wealth on earth as a means by which the “root of evil is perfectly cut out”.\textsuperscript{1191} Francis helped to establish or re-establish what Christ had instituted, i.e., “holy poverty” as the special prerogative “for the apostles” and for all “who wished to follow in their footsteps”.\textsuperscript{1192}

Francis knew that the possession of goods and riches was “not sinful in itself” but that by giving them up for the sake of Christ he might show the world and culture around him “an act of perfection” in love.\textsuperscript{1193} Like for the Dominicans and other popular religious movements, some of these practices enabled Francis and the lesser brothers to exemplify or embody a counterexample to the damaging materialism and spiritual lethargy that were prevalent in the culture of their day. I argued, using Thomas of Celano’s commentary in the \textit{Vita Prima}, that Francis’s behaviours also served as a self-aware and transparent way that Francis battled his personal struggles related to his family background and personal experiences growing up as the son of a merchant during the high Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{1194}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1187} Bonaventure, 176.
\textsuperscript{1188} Bonaventure, 103.
\textsuperscript{1189} Bonaventure, 103.
\textsuperscript{1190} Bonaventure, 184, 190.
\textsuperscript{1191} Bonaventure, 177.
\textsuperscript{1192} Bonaventure, 180.
\textsuperscript{1193} Bonaventure, 205.
\textsuperscript{1194} Manselli supports this line of thinking regarding the impact of Francis’s background and past personal activities as a “young merchant” (1988, 282). In other words, from the vantage point of Francis’s training in business as the son of a merchant, he saw the “facility with which notaries converted illegal business into legal, or else used clever distinctions to get around ... prohibitions” (282). Thus, Manselli describes how Francis had
\end{flushleft}
In this regard, there is no evidence that Francis demanded any of the other brothers to practise the various public acts of self-abasement that he foisted upon himself (i.e., insults, a rope to the neck, etc.). Francis knew himself that to increase in or to hope for “temporal goods” put at risk of destruction the charity by which he sought to draw the faithful back to the church. Thus, these types of behaviours were unique to Francis and were meant to help him obey, adapt and maintain his own personal ideal of poverty, as he understood it, to follow Christ. In the next sections, I analyse the other damaging case studies from Francis’s life, which on their traditional interpretation, discredit and disqualify Francis as a good model of Christian humility. I start this examination by explaining the traditional view of each one of these controversial case studies, before turning to reconsider them in light of more recent and updated Franciscan scholarship and then in terms of the lifelong learning theory.

The Role of Learning & Theological Education in the Order

Francis’s early views of learning and education in the order, as he understood them through the lens of his original ideal of poverty, should not be understated or brushed aside too quickly in this discussion. For a person to have any level of education, including the ownership of books, was not commonplace but a sign of wealth and prestige in the high Middle Ages. For this reason, when Francis strips naked before his father and Guido I at the townhall in Assisi, he steps away from not only his heritage – i.e., what he could receive in the future by way of an inheritance, but also, Francis forfeits all that he had once held as collateral in the present, which included his education and the prestige and advantage that came with it. For Francis, this defining act meant that members of the order, who were once from noble families, might now be subject to others within the order who were from “lesser families” or from a lower social ranking.

The Traditional Interpretation

Franciscan scholar, John Moorman asserts that Francis viewed study and education as that which gets in the way of true poverty because these necessitate the owning of books, including a place to read the books. The inclusion of any sort of learning or education equated to the ward off these sorts of engrained acts of cleverness within himself because they threatened to compromise his example of Christ to others.


Şenocak, 2012, 244.

Şenocak, 2012, 244.

obtaining of wealth, status, and the hierarchies that come with these – all of which were not originally part of how Francis had envisioned his humble ideal of poverty for himself and the order. Moorman concludes that for Francis, study “interferes with humility” because it creates a sense of pride in the student which is opposed to being part of those who make up “the dregs of society”. However, Francis’s lifestyle and the ideal of poverty (in all regards) were only “attainable” by a small number of his followers, especially as the order’s numbers increased across different countries and cultures, and “tensions inevitably rose”.

Scholars, such as Moorman and Sabatier argue that “the developments” and practical measures that were enacted by the Holy See in the later years of Francis’s life were “a perversion” of his original ideals. These scholars point out that the church magisterium wanted to make “full use” of the order and took advantage of Francis by betraying him during the institutionalising process. The first example of this betrayal came by way of the order’s connections with “important theology schools in Paris and Oxford”, which went against Francis’s ideal that “knowledge” is a type of property - not to mention owning books. These same scholars argue that once Francis died, Pope Gregory IX’s bull *Quo elongati* (1230), which authorised the Franciscans to hold or maintain “buildings, furnishings and books by means of a third party”, confused the distinction between “possession and use”, and in essence, redefined Francis’s original ideal of poverty for the order.

Gregory’s bull represented the last straw by showing “convenience” in the institutionalisation process rather than necessity and good faith towards Francis’s original ideals. However, before Gregory’s decree, scholars claim that there was a slow and steady encroachment of learning and theological education in the order, which was a tell-tale sign that Francis was losing sway and influence. This conflict then came to a head during the writing of the *Rules*, and finally through Francis’s last Testament. Modern textual critic, Paul Sabatier underscores Francis’s “grief and anguish” over the order’s growing push for theological education and “learning”. Francis saw this, as Sabatier interprets it, as “the rout of an army” which overthrew the order’s original and

1200 Moorman, 1968, 54.
1201 Barber, 1993, 147.
1202 Moorman, 1968, 54.
1203 Barber, 1993, 147.
1204 Barber, 1993, 147.
1205 Barber, 1993, 147.
1206 Barber, 1993, 147.
1207 Moorman, 1968, 54.
established ideals about poverty.\textsuperscript{1208}

\textbf{A Counter Interpretation}

Contemporary Franciscan scholars, such as Neslihan Şenocak and Michael Robson have asserted that the trend of papal thinking at the time (with Francis’s input and example before he died) was to slowly “remodel” the order, allowing it to adapt to current circumstances, which included the need for learning and ongoing theological education whilst maintaining the “essential values” that were important to Francis as its founder.\textsuperscript{1209} Moreover, Lateran IV’s decision to seek renewal and reform in the propagation of the gospel entailed an initiative for all preachers to be properly instructed and trained.\textsuperscript{1210} This, coupled with the fast-changing nature and scope of education and the growing intellectual climate in Europe (i.e., with the rise of universities as described in chapter five), meant that Francis and his followers were often “pitted against skilled disputants steeped in the scriptures” and trained in other scholastic disciplines.\textsuperscript{1211} These types of scenarios made it imperative that certain brothers receive theological education and that the order incorporate some system of ongoing learning, which included the possession of books – perhaps not right away, but eventually.\textsuperscript{1212} In this regard, Şenocak and Robson argue that Francis changed his mind or that he evolved, adapting and adjusting his ideals about poverty related to the necessity of learning and the role of study in the order.\textsuperscript{1213}

Şenocak recounts how Francis and the friars chose the city of Paris as one of their first settlements outside of Italy in August of 1219 because with “the presence of the university there”, it provided the greatest potential for not only educating recruits but also drawing “learned men” into the order.\textsuperscript{1214} Later, in September of 1224 the order of lesser brothers entered England at Dover and in less than two months had formed settlements in London, Canterbury and Oxford and by 1225 in Cambridge and Northampton.\textsuperscript{1215} Şenocak points out that these last three locations, which became “provincial schools in the order”, were specifically chosen because of the presence of renowned and fast-growing universities in each of them.\textsuperscript{1216} Thus, “the story of the rise of learning in the Franciscan

\textsuperscript{1208} Sabatier, 1908, 277.
\textsuperscript{1210} Robson, 1997, 173.
\textsuperscript{1211} Robson, 1997, 173.
\textsuperscript{1212} Robson, 1997, 173.
\textsuperscript{1213} Şenocak, 2012, 56-57.
\textsuperscript{1215} Şenocak, 2012, 53-54.
\textsuperscript{1216} Şenocak, 2012, 53-54.
order took a decisive turn when the very learned started to enter the order in the university towns". Şenocak notes that “in the earliest phase of Franciscan history”, Francis’s ideal of poverty seemed like a definitive and “practical impediment to any kind of intellectual undertaking”. However, writes Şenocak, “this same apostolic poverty of the friars evolved from being an impediment to becoming a substantial justification for the friars’ involvement in studies” giving the Franciscans a reputation of being “better teachers” than those who did not live a life of poverty.

Whether Francis and others in the order knew it at the time, theological education and learning, once introduced and allowed, would “irreparably” alter the original unity and uniformity of the order and Francis’s initial vision of poverty. However, the “tangible benefits” of this openness toward the pursuit of learning were also “undeniable” on society at large and for the church magisterium which needed friars who could command respect, carry some level of authority and hold high positions in the ever-increasing number of universities emerging in western Europe. Such benefits included unprecedented occurrences, like the Franciscans opening their schools to “secular clergy” as a way to instruct them on matters of faith and to establish a “doctrinal influence” in Europe. Although there are many historical figures to name or point to from the first three decades of the order in relation to their influence and promotion of learning and theological education (i.e., Gregory of Naples, Albert of Pisa and John of Piancarpino), I wish to highlight one, Anthony of Padua (mentioned in the previous chapter), whose role and relationship with Francis provide corroborating proof that Francis understood the need for and shifted his thinking about learning and theological education for the continuing influence of the order within a changing culture.

From the beginning of the order’s rapid growth, one of the most legendary of the Franciscan “wandering preachers” was Anthony of Padua. On a pivotal occasion, Anthony writes Francis a
letter to ask for “permission to teach theology to the friars”. Francis’s reply was perhaps surprising to brothers then and to scholars today: “It pleases me that you teach sacred theology to the friars, provided that you do not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion, as it is said in the Rule”. Francis trusted Anthony. Şenocak contends that “sometimes the relationship between the two men is alluded to as that of a father and son, and at other times that of a commander and his soldier”. Manselli notes that in many ways, “the theology learned at Paris had destroyed the spirit of Francis” which is precisely why Francis was relieved to entrust the “responsibility” of theological education and training for those who needed it in the order to Anthony. For Francis, Anthony was capable of maintaining and not “suffocating the spirit of prayer and devotion” while simultaneously instructing theology to his listeners and the brethren. Similar to Francis’s preaching, Anthony’s words could reach and touch the hearts of “the faithful and lead them to penance”. However, Anthony was also skilled at addressing the clergy and admonishing them against their “evil deeds”, providing “energetic directions for extirpating these evils … while still rigorously respecting them”.

For these reasons, Anthony is considered the first “Lector” or Master of Theology - “the second foundation stone” of the order of lesser brothers. Anthony stands (with Francis’s support) at the beginning of those mendicants who dominated theologically, such as Bonaventure, Aquinas, Peter John Olivi (1248-1298), and Duns Scotus (1266-1308). Francis accepted the necessity of education and learning (including owning books) with reluctance and perhaps “worry” at first, but ultimately understood that it was not only necessary but crucial for the future success of the ministry and the order’s role in reforming the church. Francis’s acceptance of such new initiatives of learning was greatly strengthened because of Anthony’s faithfulness in poverty and his commitment to the gospel – including Anthony’s effective and famous preaching.

---

1226 Şenocak, 2012, 57. Şenocak references the letter in Esser’s work (1966, 94-95) as known to Thomas of Celano and mentioned in the Second Life (57).
1227 Şenocak, 2012, 112.
1228 Manselli, 1988, 283-284.
1229 Manselli, 1988, 284.
1230 Manselli, 1988, 284.
1231 Manselli, 1988, 284.
1232 Robson, 1997, 158. See also, Şenocak, 2012, 40.
1233 Robson, 1997, 183. Manselli argues, much like Şenocak, that once professors in Paris, such as Alexander of Hales, began joining the order, the shift towards theological education had occurred (285). However, Manselli asserts that these men “knew indeed how to align theological doctrine with the spirit of piety and devotion” (1988, 285).
1234 Şenocak, 2012, 126-127.
exhortation to the order in terms of education was to continue the pursuit of virtue in theological study.\textsuperscript{1236}

Because of Francis’s example and willingness to alter his ways of thinking regarding education and learning, the order of lesser brothers was able to introduce “a novum et tenerum spiritum pietatis or a new and tender spirit of piety into Christian living” that started from a place of newfound authority (i.e., at the universities) and influenced the culture and helped to reform the church.\textsuperscript{1237} In the next sections, I examine the other controversial case studies in Francis’s later years that cast doubt upon his positive example of humility, such as his apparent erratic behaviours and motivations during the formalising of the Rules and the writing of his Testament. These remain at the forefront of the traditional narrative about Francis, i.e., portrayals that signify conspiracy, division, and great upheaval in the ranks of the order and against the magisterium of the church – all of which jeopardise Francis’s good example of Christian humility.

\textbf{Francis’s Later Years: The Rules & Testament}

For each of these case studies, as described in the introduction and similar to my analysis of Francis’s changing perspectives on learning and theological education, I provide the early modern interpretation or traditional view whose proponents, such as Sabatier and Moorman have argued for the better part of a century that these events are riddled with controversy and internal and external conspiracy. It is important to get a picture of this account because, by and large, it continues to influence the literature and perceptions about Francis today. After delineating the traditional accounts related to either the Rules or the Testament, I present recent scholarship that tells a counter-narrative or gives an alternative way to view these case studies in Francis’s later years. On the basis of these findings, I then use the lifelong learning theory as an interpretative lens through which to reconsider Francis’s humility in a new and life-affirming way.

\textbf{The Rules: The Traditional Interpretation}

At the outset, Sabatier and Moorman have theorised that when the Rule of 1221 (or the “Earlier Rule”, ER) was not approved by the magisterium, Francis withdrew out of bitter regret and agitation, protesting his final disapproval by writing his Testament.\textsuperscript{1238} This interpretation is based on Francis’s alleged disagreement with the approved Rule of 1223 (or the “Later Rule”, LR), which prescribed a different ideal of poverty than the one that Francis had originally envisioned for the

\textsuperscript{1236} Robson, 1997, 173.
\textsuperscript{1237} Manselli, 1988, 285.
\textsuperscript{1238} Sabatier, 1908, 239.
order after his death. In a chapter entitled, “The Crisis of the Order”, Sabatier argues from a textual fragment that as Francis arrived in Venice in September of 1220, he was sad and anxious. Then, as Francis left Venice and entered Bologna, Sabatier recounts that Francis had to deal with “backsliders”, who were in the process of building a house for the order.

Such actions were against all that Francis had been teaching and upholding for himself and the order throughout the last ten years since the founding of the order in 1209. On Sabatier’s account, Francis “ordered” that the house be evacuated, but was later informed that the house did not belong to the order but to the church. Sabatier interprets this incident as a grim moment for Francis because he was reminded of the order’s “association” with the church and the need “to obey” the Holy See as it went through the process of institutionalisation. Sabatier’s narrative plays out that Francis was forced “to join the ranks” of those before him who had reluctantly submitted to ecclesiastical authority.

Sabatier asserts that Francis was anxious during the years, 1220-1221, but remained hopeful that “the situation was not desperate” – i.e., that there was still time to remedy his ailing original ideal and vision of poverty for the order. Sabatier’s account portrays Francis, in these later years, as one who is embroiled in a critical crisis. Sabatier’s traditional interpretation paints Francis, from his resignation onwards, as burdened, sad, “demoralized”, “heart-broken” and “soul-sick”.

After Francis resigned his position as Minister General of the order on the Feast of Saint Michael in 1220 and after sitting-Pope Honorius III asked the order to write a rule, Francis involved himself heavily in the task “along with others who had juridical and clerical experience”, since Francis had little to no knowledge about such matters. Sabatier writes: “Never was a man less capable of making a rule than Francis.”

---

1239 Sabatier, 1908, 239.
1240 Sabatier, 1908, 239.
1241 Sabatier, 1908, 239.
1242 Sabatier, 1908, 242.
1243 Sabatier, 1908, 243.
1244 Sabatier, 1908, 243.
1245 Sabatier, 1908, 246-247.
1246 Michael W. Blastic, Jay M. Hammond, and J.A. Wayne Hellman, eds., “The Writings of Francis of Assisi: Rules, Testament and Admonitions” in Studies in Early Franciscan Sources, Volume 2 (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2011), 24. Also, Short writes that Francis’s name is at the beginning and the end of the first Rule of 1221 and that there is little doubt that Francis had a hand in the document “but there are other voices as well” (2011, 50-67).
1247 Sabatier, 1908, 253.
The Early Rule of 1221

The ER was finished by the summer of 1221 but is not extant in its original form.1250 The ER was presented in a lengthy, twenty-four chapter format.1251 Scholars denote nine thematic sections in the ER.1252 The themes run throughout several sections which follow a simple outline: 1) a prologue, 2) the daily life of the brothers, 3) living in the world as evangelical men, and 4) penance, and 5) conclusion.1253 The text was transmitted through manuscripts (about two dozen) with what some scholars call “perplexing” differences.1254 Sabatier argues that the arduous process of writing the Rule (ER) had transformed Francis unwillingly from “the Francis of the early years”, who relied solely upon God into “a submissive monk”.1255 Francis’s initial vision for his order and ministry from 1209 was on the line, and these pressures put Francis in a state of “anguish”.1256 Francis offered his living and “spontaneous” desire for the continuance of the order within the pages of the ER, and it was utterly rejected and crushed by the process of institutionalism.1257 The ER represented Francis’s heart and what was truly “Franciscan” about the order, which for Sabatier was left out of the LR, marking it as “the work of the Church”.1258 Sabatier argues that the approved LR was nothing more than “a reciprocal contract” with little more than Francis’s name on it to represent the only shared element between it and the ER.1259

In support of these conclusions, Moorman says that Francis “fought and lost” the battle related to the rules, claiming that the opposition was “too strong” for Francis in the end.1260 Moorman describes the years of the rules, for Francis, by using phrases like, “passing through the furnace” or as “great suffering”, whereby Francis had to “battle” for his ideals and vision for the order.1261 For Moorman, Francis waged a personal and lonely war against, for example, brother Elias, who allegedly “destroyed” documents.1262 Moorman contends that cardinal Ugolino regularly put

---

1250 Some scholars might refer to the “earlier rule” as the proto-rule (non-extant) that I mentioned in chapter six when Francis went before Innocent III in 1209. For this thesis, the Earlier Rule will refer to the Rule of 1221, the Regula non-Bullata.
1252 Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman also discuss fragments that could fit in either the ER or the LR. These fragments are not of concern to me for this thesis (2011, 24-25).
1255 Sabatier, 1908, 250.
1256 Sabatier, 1908, 251.
1257 Sabatier, 1908, 253.
1258 Sabatier, 1908, 254.
1259 Sabatier, 1908, 253.
1260 Moorman, 1968, 57.
1261 Moorman, 1968, 56.
1262 Moorman, 1968, 56.
“great pressure” on Francis concerning his idealised and fanciful project of poverty as he was seeking to portray it in the ER. 1263 Moorman writes that by 1221, “troubles” had beset the order of lesser brothers because it had grown exponentially all over Europe in exactly the way Francis had originally envisioned that it would. 1264

The order’s way of life, as prescribed by Francis, which called the brothers to rely on “the faithful” for daily food, hung precariously in the balance and became difficult to sustain. 1265 Some within the order found the insecurity of such a life difficult to practise long term. 1266 Some brothers in leadership viewed this sort of lifestyle as too risky because they felt responsible for the lives of those in their charge throughout regions across Europe. 1267 Moorman underscores how Ugolino urged Francis to use one of the existing “Rules”, such as from the Benedictines or the Dominicans (i.e., from Augustine), rather than starting from scratch to devise a new rule for the order. 1268 Francis would not hear of this, and by writing the ER, wanted to give “expression to some of his deepest convictions”. 1269 The task of writing a rule, which incorporated all the changing and “expanding” needs of the order, proved harder than Francis initially thought. 1270 Moorman writes that “division of opinion” became a great distress to Francis. So much so that, Moorman says, Francis became “stern and even violent” with “powerful emotions” – acting with “sudden passion and rebuke with severity.” 1271

**The Later Rule of 1223**

At first glance, the difference between the ER and the LR is the length. 1272 The ER is 24 chapters or “ten folio pages”, while the LR is only 12 chapters, no more than three folio pages. 1273 The longer “mysterious charm” or sacramental nature of the ER is replaced with, what Sabatier calls, the shortened “code of 1223.” 1274 Sabatier argues that the ER is full of Francis’s joyous outbursts, coupled with his “bitter sobs” and moving inspiration. 1275 Francis’s ER is a mystically beautiful set of

---

1264 Moorman, 1968, 53.
1265 Moorman, 1968, 53.
1266 Moorman, 1968, 53.
1267 Moorman, 1968, 53.
1268 Moorman, 1968, 55.
1269 Moorman, 1968, 55.
1270 Moorman, 1968, 55.
1271 Moorman, 1968, 55-56.
1272 Sabatier, 1908, 254.
1273 Sabatier, 1908, 254. Also, Moorman, 1968, 58.
1274 Sabatier, 1908, 257-258.
1275 Sabatier, 1908, 255.
“artless repetitions” and not juridical enough to stand as a rule.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 257-258.} On Sabatier’s account, the ER is “dear to Francis’s heart” while the LR misses all that Francis held dear.\footnote{Sabatier, 2908, 258.} Moorman asserts that the telling and revealing phrases about Francis’s intentions for the order were deleted altogether from the ER to the LR. For example, capstone phrases are missing such as, “take nothing with you” or rejoice to “live among the poor and despised as Christ” and “go everywhere on foot”.\footnote{Moorman, 1968, 58.} Francis, declares Moorman, was forced to strike out these sorts of passages.\footnote{Moorman, 1968, 57.} Moorman speculates that Francis most likely departed before the confirmation hearing of the LR because of the stress involved in the overall institutionalising process during the years, 1220-1223, rendering Francis despondent and sicker than usual.\footnote{Moorman, 1968, 58.}

Sabatier and Moorman indict Ugolino as the primary conspirator against Francis because he conferenced with Francis on more than one occasion and tried to curtail Francis’s vigour and ideals.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 259.} Sabatier alleges that Ugolino cast doubt and pointed out defects about Francis’s project, going line by line in the ER.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 259.} The anxiety of soul that Francis experienced was brought on no doubt as the magisterium, through such figures as the cardinal, demanded a “corpse-like obedience” from Francis.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 261.} Sabatier also blames Elias for Francis’s failure to get the ER approved.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 264.} Sabatier asserts that Francis sat at Elias’s feet, pulling at his robe and begging him for the privilege of interjecting a word to the brothers.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 265.} Sabatier contends that “ecclesial policy” had rendered Francis “useless” and weak to the order, especially for its future direction.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 275.}

Sabatier argues against the notion that Francis’s point of view changed over time related to the Rules and how he envisioned the order to continue with his ideal of poverty after his death.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 264.} Sabatier writes unequivocally that “almost everything which was done in the order after 1221 was done either without Francis’s knowledge or against his will”.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 275.} In the end, Francis lost the battle because on 25 November 1223, the LR was approved and erased from the order’s future “the apostolic life”, trading it for a half-ecclesial / half-lay “character”.\footnote{Sabatier, 1908, 283.}
the LR “is indirectly the work of the Church,” and not representative of Francis’s will or vision in the least.\textsuperscript{1290} Francis had given his ideal and original vision for the order in the ER, and it was rejected. The Holy See, intent on future reform, made an exacting “intervention” to direct Francis’s order away from its founder and his original vision of poverty.\textsuperscript{1291}

**The Rules: A Counter Interpretation**

In contrast to Sabatier and Moorman, who espouse the Francis versus the Holy See traditional interpretation, what is uncontested among contemporary text critics is that the ER represents “many voices and authors”.\textsuperscript{1292} The process by which the ER came together is one of “layered revisions” from “a large group of people from different countries and cultures”.\textsuperscript{1293} The final document was meant to be a representation of how hundreds of people had lived for decades and across countries in the order of lesser brothers.\textsuperscript{1294} What seems agreeable and reasonable to scholars is that the ER is a complicated document with numerous authors and voices weighing in throughout its many chapters and main subject content.

Similarly, the text entitled, the “Rule of the Friars Minor” or the *Regula bullata*, dated 29 November 1223 (LR) and certified by Honorius III, preserved at the Basilica of Francis of Assisi, is without a doubt authored by Francis and other ministers who were gathered at the Chapter of 1223.\textsuperscript{1295} Although the LR reads in the first person, Francis is not the only voice represented or heard in the LR.\textsuperscript{1296} Much like the ER, there is a community of voices represented “among the brothers”.\textsuperscript{1297} The LR contains a dynamic community conversation and dialogue about a life that members of the order had been living, together, across time, countries and cultures.\textsuperscript{1298} Interpreting the LR as a collaboratively developed document reflects the fact that Francis knew himself, and that he had little ability to write such a juridical document in the first place. The evolution of the ER to the LR reveals logical editing that is often typical of any new draft document, especially one as important as a rule to guide the daily life of the lesser brothers.

The LR is written in such a way that it is no longer a complex and perplexing 24 chapters, like the ER, but instead only twelve “brief” chapters.\textsuperscript{1299} Scholars assert that this reduction in chapters

---

\textsuperscript{1290} Sabatier, 1908, 254.
\textsuperscript{1291} Sabatier, 1908, 254.
\textsuperscript{1292} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 18.
\textsuperscript{1293} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 18.
\textsuperscript{1294} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 25.
\textsuperscript{1295} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 165.
\textsuperscript{1296} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 165.
\textsuperscript{1297} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 165.
\textsuperscript{1298} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 163ff.
\textsuperscript{1299} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 163ff.
does not alter the basic material in the ER but simply removes citations from indistinguishable authors or voices, including some scripture references (i.e., in ER 18, 21-24). The LR contains only “four explicit scriptural citations” in the whole of the text, whereas the ER is replete with these. For example, in ER 18 as compared to LR 8, there are numerous scriptural citations, which correspond with the general structuring and administration of the order, including how often the ministers and ministers general of any region meet (approximately every three years).

The LR is comprised of nine sections that are remarkably similar in content to the thematic contours of the ER as I explained above, but the LR is reduced and clarified. In this regard, “much of the text from the ER” is incorporated throughout the LR but with a clearing up of grammatical inconsistencies, along with the striking out of emphatic language. Examples of these changes might be seen by contrasting ER 16 and LR 12, where instead of a mandated mission to go to other lands, perhaps for martyrdom, there is instead a caution given, with an addition that such exploits gain prior permission. ER 16 contains “a mixture of singular and plural [usages]”, which are clarified “to a consistent plural” in LR 12. Scholars, such as Blastic and Hellman argue that, by using detailed side-side comparisons, the ER and the LR, with the various changes, omissions, strikeouts and additions, are quite similar in content, with only logical edits, from one document to the other.

However, there is one last concern to address. Some contemporary text critics have argued that “the writing style of the LR is different in numerous points [to the ER]—many of them significant points as well.” In this regard, scholars, such as Rusconi have asserted that the style variation between the ER and LR are due to the following: first, that the order of lesser brothers had transformed from a scanty group of twelve to thousands around Europe, signalling an inevitable change of practice for such numbers across country and culture. Second, that the magisterium accepted Francis’s direct input in the LR, explaining the “impersonal” stylised portions that seem randomly interjected throughout. For these reasons, what the LR’s style seems to represent is a clear blending of voices (or “various contributors”) from Francis, other brothers and finally, the church, united together for the future continuance, influence and success of the lesser brothers.

---

1300 Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 166.
1305 Rusconi, 2008, 58.
1306 Rusconi, 2008, 58.
1307 Rusconi, 2008, 58.
In summary, these contemporary textual considerations, as I have delineated them above, do not support Sabatier’s and Moorman’s traditional narrative of Francis as engrossed in an ideological tussle with his order and the Holy See concerning the writing of the ER and the LR. When Sabatier says, for example, that the LR was “not Francis”, he is accurate. However, not because the magisterium was seeking to overthrow Francis’s vision, but rather the Rule, from the start, was never meant to represent only Francis’s voice. The Rule was to be a collaboration between Francis and those who knew best how to construct a juridical document, which reflected the life of the lesser brothers across time, cultures and countries. There are many authors represented in both the ER and the LR, and not a lonely Francis who was against the world. The comparison of the documents shows logical and necessary reductions, strikeouts and edits. These collaborations and the inevitable changes that took place over three years were mentally and emotionally taxing on Francis, but they were necessary to legitimise, regularise and ultimately assure the official status of the lesser brothers as a religious order of the church that would continue long after Francis died.

Francis’s Unwavering Loyalty to the Church

As a corroborating excursus in favour of the less divisive counter-narrative to that of the traditional one, I point to Francis’s early and ongoing desire for sanctioning by the Holy See and his consistent allegiance to church clergy throughout his life and ministry. Jacques Dalarun underscores that Francis himself initiated (against local parish advice) the pilgrimage to Rome for official institutionalising in 1209 by the confirmation of Pope Innocent III.1309 As I recounted in the previous chapter, Guido I was visiting Rome and saw Francis with his followers. He feared that Francis was leaving Assisi, his homeland.1310 However, once Guido heard and understood that Francis planned to become officially sanctioned by the church, he vowed his support.1311 Examples from the Vita Prima that I have previously delineated in chapter six support the notion that Francis had a strong personal allegiance to the church. I highlight a few here. Thomas notes that Francis’s respect and love for the church remained constant throughout his life and ministry.1312 As Francis instructed his followers concerning prayer, Francis told them to pray as Christ had taught his disciples using the “Our Father” and to ask Christ to bless the church throughout the world.1313 In their journeys, as the brothers drew near to a church built in any place, if they saw it

1312 I Cel. 1.XVII.45, 222.
1313 I Cel. 1.XVII.45, 222.
from a distance, they bowed down and thanked God for it. Thomas recounts a time when some of the brothers confessed their sins to “a certain secular priest” whom many considered to have a “bad reputation”. The brothers did not wish to believe the gossip about the priest and continued to go to him in “proper reverence”.

The greatest evidence of Francis’s love for and loyalty to the church was his initial calling from Christ to rebuild cathedrals which were in disrepair, starting with Saint Damian. Other scholars assert that there was “no indication” that Francis was upset or bothered by the demands of the church magisterium in the later years surrounding the formalising of the Rules for the order. Thomas asserts that Francis had a strong affection and reverence for the church, which was evidenced when he taught them to pray, reminding them of all God’s people in churches worldwide. In the end, Francis did his best to see his order through the difficult process to become a properly sanctioned order out of love and care for his brothers and also his allegiance to the church.

**Francis’s Testament: The Traditional Interpretation**

As I have described above, Sabatier and Moorman pit Francis against both his order and some in the magisterium (i.e., Ugolino and Elias) related to the writing and formalising of the *Rules*. On this traditional account, Francis loses this battle, which includes his original ideal of poverty that forbids learning and the pursuit of theological education. Francis had only one thing left, and that was his example. Francis’s example took the form of his Testament (or will). Moorman calls Francis’s Testament “the most moving of all his works ... more touching than all the *Rules* and admonitions” put together. For Sabatier, Francis’s Testament is the linchpin that unlocks the true schism that took place between Francis and the others, like Elias and Ugolino. Sabatier writes that the Testament is the “true note” as to Francis’s vision, dreams, and hopes for the continuance of the order and his ideal of poverty after his death. It is in the Testament that we see Francis “absolutely” and with a type of “candor” that is unmatched anywhere else in his writings or from

---

1314 *ICel* 1.XVII.45, 222.
1315 *ICel* 1.XVII.46, 223. Manselli corroborates, “Francis asserted respect for priests, respect for the Body and Blood of Christ that are present at the sacrament of the Eucharist, and above, respect for Christ himself” (1988, 68).
1316 *ICel* 1.XVII.46, 223.
1317 *ICel* 1.VIII.18, 195.
1318 Thompson, 2013, 96ff.
1319 Cf. *ICel* 1.XVII.45, 222.
1320 Sabatier, 1908, 275.
1321 Sabatier, 1908, 275.
1322 Moorman, 1968, 77.
1323 Sabatier, 1908, 334.
any biographer or hagiographer.1324

To set the stage for this honest word from Francis, Sabatier recounts that as Francis approached his death, he did so with singing.1325 Francis was brought by his brothers to Portiuncula where he happily resigned himself to what was ahead of him. In these last months of his life, Francis experienced “almost an entire cessation of pain” – a renewal of life.1326 This new life and energy were the push Francis needed to dictate his Testament to the faithful brothers.1327 Sabatier claims that this Testament is “not an appendix to the Rule of 1223” but rather a “revocation” of it.1328 Sabatier supports this by citing a portion of Thomas’s Vita Secunda where Francis, in 1222 warns the order to maintain the version of poverty that he had originally set forth for them.1329 Sabatier concludes that in the “critical hour”, Francis defined how the order must continue and how the LR was to be taken concerning his original vision.1330 Francis’s Testament gave the final word as the moral authority over the ecclesial authority.1331 Moorman puts it: “Francis asks [the brothers] not to interfere with what he has written [and to] keep it together with the Rule”. 1332

In this regard, Pope Gregory IX, known as the first interpreter of Francis’s Testament, states in his Quo elongati (1230):

The holy confessor of Christ, Francis … did not want the words of his Rule … [to] be glossed … and that in the Testament the confessor of Christ demonstrated a single-hearted purpose and that you, therefore, aspire to conform to his just longings and holy desires. [But] wishing to remove all anxiety from your hearts, we declare that you are not bound by the Testament. For without the consent of the brothers, and especially of the ministers, Francis could not make obligatory a matter that touches everyone. Nor could he in any way whatsoever bind his successor because an equal has no authority over his equal.1333

Sabatier laments with “bitter sadness” that Gregory IX removed the binding power of the Testament for the order’s future.1334 For Sabatier, this act alone set the order spiralling downwards.1335 Other
scholars agree with Sabatier asserting that Francis, by 1226, saw the direction of the order and sought to re-root it as a way to re-direct it towards “an earlier historical understanding of their way of life”. Moorman concludes that Francis could do no more than leave his Testament, whereby he “deliberately” leaves the order in the hands of “others who could be more effective than he”. Moorman describes Francis’s official and final chapter as the raising of the white flag of defeat.

**Francis’s Testament: A Counter Interpretation**

The Testament’s earliest manuscript is found in the Assisi codex (1240/50) and carries with it a strong oral tradition, which is described in the Assisi codex 338. This “Testament is an authentic text from Francis of Assisi” dictated after a long illness, near the end of his life in the year 1226. Francis’s Testament stands as his declaration of love and concern for the brothers and their collective way of life which he wanted ‘written down’. Contemporary textual critic, Rosalind Brooke argues, after analysing all the “Documents” (i.e., the Testament including the Rules and others) that the Testament is Francis’s “autobiography” wherein he emphasises faith, the apostolic life and obedience – for himself, as a witness and example to others. Brooke asserts that Francis wanted to reinvigorate and reaffirm his faith and allegiance to the church and to its clergy. In this regard, the Testament was an echo of Francis’s own personal calling and ideal to live out the gospel – “as he had written it in the Rule (1223) which the Pope had confirmed.”

---

**Franciscan Poverty: The Doctrine of the Absolute Poverty of Christ and the Apostles in the Franciscan Order, 1210-1323** (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1998). Lambert provides a good overview of the historical issues at stake, asserting (among other things) that “the Franciscans fought over poverty because they cared about it” and disputations of this nature were common in medieval religious life (268). He concludes that “over the epochs of the conflicts” there has been a tendency among some, if not many, to “turn away from the questions of dominion and use” and instead reclaim “the pattern of St. Francis” (268).

---


1337 Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 225, 235. Also, Esser published a critical edition of Francis’s Testament (1976) whereby he considers other textual work by Lemmens Wadding and Boehmer. Esser’s edition was credibly translated into English by Armstrong et al (1999). Esser’s work is useful because he corroborates that after the death of Francis, each region had their own copies of the Testament but that these “regional families of manuscripts” maintain an “amazing unity” (Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 227, 237).

1338 Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 224. Also, the Testament is mentioned word for word as the “command” of Francis by Gregory IX in his Quo elongati (1230, previously described) who states that it was dictated by Francis at the end of his life— as Bonaventure intimates “at the time of [Francis’s] death (224).”

1339 Brooke, 1975, 24.

1340 Brooke, 1975, 24.
Brooke concludes that Francis was exhorting (perhaps unsuccessfully) those who would follow after him to labour at an ideal of voluntary poverty as he himself had sought to do, though imperfectly as theory and practice are never easy.\textsuperscript{1346}

Brooke supports her claims by describing Francis as administratively incompetent by his own admission with an aversion to “exercising management control”.\textsuperscript{1347} In this regard, Brooke describes Francis as one who maintained a “readiness to obey a novice of an hour’s standing”.\textsuperscript{1348} Francis entrusted the “operations” of the order to the care of others throughout his life and ministry, seeking himself to lead almost exclusively \textit{by example to his followers}.\textsuperscript{1349} Because of the difficult life of poverty that Francis had chosen for himself, Brooke writes that Francis died young, “but with a song”.\textsuperscript{1350} Brooke’s research underscores Francis’s personal struggles to “be himself, in his own life, a model and example to all the friars.”\textsuperscript{1351} She argues that Francis’s \textit{Testament} was his last attempt to pass on the “witness of his life for [the order’s] guidance and encouragement”.\textsuperscript{1352}

Scholars like Manselli agree that Francis’s sole aim, in the end, was to accentuate and intensify “his personal good example by displaying it in every way” possible.\textsuperscript{1353} Manselli points to the “companions” who were at Francis’s side until his death, witnessing the fact that Francis “intended to give [a] good example in meekness, penance, humility, and resignation”.\textsuperscript{1354} This example was Francis’s greatest and “liveliest concern in his last years” and one that he outlined in numerous ways, including by writing his \textit{Testament}.\textsuperscript{1355} However, Manselli argues that Francis was also well-aware that in writing down his personal example and ideal of poverty that it might and most certainly would later and for years to come incite “an autopsy of exegetes”.\textsuperscript{1356} Francis had the foresight to know that if he wrote his \textit{Testament} as “the good example that he had been given [by Christ] and maintained [himself] within the order” that the risk was high that it would be misconstrued and taken and interpreted incongruently to his heartfelt wishes.\textsuperscript{1357} Manselli maintains that this is why it was paramount for Francis to choose the right one to be his replacement as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1346] Brooke, 1975, 24.
\item[1347] Brooke, 1975, 22-23.
\item[1348] Brooke, 1975, 28.
\item[1349] Brooke, 1975, 23.
\item[1350] Brooke, 1975, 23.
\item[1351] Brooke, 1975, 24 (italics added).
\item[1352] Brooke, 1975, 24.
\item[1353] Manselli, 1988, 271.
\item[1354] Manselli, 1988, 271.
\item[1355] Manselli, 1988, 271.
\item[1356] Manselli, 1988, 271.
\item[1357] Manselli, 1988, 271.
\end{footnotes}
Minister General of the order in 1220.\textsuperscript{1358}

In more recent textual research on the Testament, scholars such as William Short and Michael Blastic argue that Francis did not mean for his writing to counter or act as a polemic against the LR, but rather that it would function as a “farewell blessing of encouragement” to the order.\textsuperscript{1359} Francis’s farewell is likened to the example of Moses in Genesis 48 or to the Apostle Paul at Mileto in Acts 20.\textsuperscript{1360} The Testament has also been portrayed as a way for Francis to draw his brothers into a “biblical covenant to walk with God’s poor”.\textsuperscript{1361} Other scholars, such as Dalarun have asserted that Francis’s Testament denotes the saint’s agitation that he felt towards himself as he sought to learn and live by example, practising his ideal of poverty that Christ had given to him in the early days of his ministry.\textsuperscript{1362}

These types of discoveries are difficult to reconcile with Sabatier’s or Moorman’s traditional accounts, which show Francis to be angry and determined to get in the last word. To interpret Francis, specifically in his final months and in his last words, as belligerent or as one who is calling out his opponents in stinging fashion as a last but calculated measure of revenge, seems unlikely, out of character and highly improbable. Moreover, these alternative interpretations do not align with a picture of Francis as the battle-worn saint who raises a white flag of defeat by writing his Testament. Instead, given these counter renderings, as I will discuss in the final, main section of the chapter, Francis shows himself to be a lifelong learner in his own right, who is self-aware, non-managerial (since he was admittedly not a good manager or administrator), flexible, creatively adaptive amid trying and difficult circumstances, determined, collaborative with others and willing to see himself as a consummate learner in need of grace throughout his life as the founder of the order. However, before saying more about Francis in terms of the lifelong learning theory, in the next section I provide one final support to this position that there is an alternative interpretation that makes sense of Francis and his behaviours in these later years (i.e., related to the Rules and the Testament) – all of which counteracts the concerns over whether Francis is a positive, life-affirming human example of humility.

Francis’s Human Example

Sabatier and Moorman label Francis’s later years as an epic battle that Francis loses. Such an account puts all three entities (i.e., the founder, the order, and the Holy See) in a bad light. Dalarun

\textsuperscript{1358} Manselli, 1988, 271.
\textsuperscript{1360} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 205.
\textsuperscript{1361} Blastic, Hammond, and Hellman, 2011, 205.
\textsuperscript{1362} See, for example, Dalarun, 2007, 190 and Dalarun, 2002, 215ff and 249ff.
takes a different approach to unravel these intricacies and inconsistencies inherent to the traditional narrative about Francis. Dalarun’s research upends the “drama of Francis” by indicting, not the church for its mistreatment or uncouth abuse of Francis’s name and vision, but instead Francis himself. Dalarun puts Francis on trial. Dalarun’s method is strategic as he initially accuses Francis of pride, citing how Francis talks about his own conversion in the language of “The Lord told me”—calling Francis “audacious” to think of himself as “the chosen of Providence”. Dalarun asserts that at times Francis seemed obsessed with himself and with the life of the order. He wonders if Francis might have been sometimes a little maniacal and “neglectful” as a leader in the later years of his life.

Dalarun questions how a humble, “poor man” like Francis could “resign” from a position of leadership when he often downplayed his role as a leader in the first place. Dalarun calls Francis’s resignation as Minister General “theoretical”, at best, since Francis’s involvement in the order’s final institutionalisation, down to the writing of his great Testament, was anything but a withdrawal of influence. What Dalarun attempts to do is honestly critique the biased positions and desires of many Franciscan scholars who attempt to maintain and protect Francis’s face of humility by moralising him at all cost. Dalarun uses striking and outrageous language, with textual support, in much the same spirit as that of Sabatier and Moorman. However, Dalarun refuses to indict members of the order or the church magisterium as he develops his theory about Francis’s behaviours. Instead, Dalarun interrogates Francis, the founder – the saint himself.

To this end, Dalarun points to Bonaventure’s omission of more than 250 Franciscan episodes which are found in various other sources, like the Legend of Perugia and the Legend of the Three Companions in finalising his Legends in 1266. Dalarun posits that these missing episodes are the “misadventures” of Francis since they do not depict him in the ways that Bonaventure and the

---

1363 Cf. Dalarun, 2002, 246ff. Dalarun describes his method (his “research project”) this way, “What I propose ... is to apply an inflexible rule resolutely, then see what kind of Francis emerges from the gallery” (247). Rather than start from the premise that Francis is the saint that the world (and church) needed and still needs today, Dalarun assumes that perhaps Francis is “weak” and thus wishes not to “sugarcoat” his life and behaviours (247). In essence, he “reverses the approach” to studying Francis with hopes of rightly viewing him as the true human saint that he actually was, “a real biography” (248).
1364 Dalarun, 2002, 211.
1365 Dalarun, 2007, 36.
1366 Dalarun, 2007, 36.
1368 Dalarun, 2007, 100ff.
1369 Dalarun, 2007, 100.
1371 Dalarun, 2002, 249. I referred to these omissions at the beginning of chapter six in relation to choosing a primary text from which to recount Francis’s biography.
church of his day wanted Francis remembered. Dalarun argues, using the content from these absent scenes, that the world is able to see Francis’s inconsistencies, his harsh learning curve as a leader dealing with the growth and expansion of the order - his hesitations and his struggles to be an influential example in the later years of his life. Dalarun shows that Francis struggled to hand over the reins of the order, especially during the institutionalisation process – i.e., writing the Rules from 1220-1223. For Dalarun, Francis’s reluctance is evidence that he laboured to “make up his mind” about how much or how little he involved himself in those final years as a leader and founder of the order. In the end, Dalarun contends that the drama surrounding Francis is not a battle between Francis, his order and the Holy See, but rather an ongoing inner “torment” for Francis, who sought to help the order institutionalise. As Dalarun describes it, Francis accepted institutionalisation whole-heartedly “in principle” (dating back to 1209 when he stood before Innocent Ill), but Francis had no idea how such a thing happened practically in the real world going forward.

The circuitous and arduous ways in which a group of 12 in 1209 transitioned into an official religious order by 1223, was expectedly messy, disorganised, and an ardent difficulty for Francis. However, Francis’s inner turmoil through it all, Dalarun believes, is partially what makes Francis appealing and utterly “human” as a humble saint who is to be admired today. Dalarun shows that as Francis attempted to and finally did let go of his ideals about how the order might continue on into the future, he does so with a great deal of human struggle and normal inconsistency. Dalarun’s account helps to replace misshapen ideals about who Francis was, with a “true portrait” of the human saint. For Dalarun, Francis’s erratic behaviours are normal human behaviours because they reflect a sense of ignorance, sometimes neglect and confusion related to his own feelings of inadequacies during a difficult season of transition.

Dalarun helps to explain why Francis can be interpreted as a free, open, understanding and imaginative figure at times, and then as a rigid, harsh and discontented ascetic at others. Dalarun calls Francis’s behaviours a type of “schizophrenic discontinuity”, which most closely resembles “the
real life” of humans in stressful transitions as they learn and figure out what to do next, especially as leaders.\textsuperscript{1384} For these reasons, Dalarun asserts that Francis was on the side of the Holy See with its juridical process towards institutionalisation all along and that there is no reason to think otherwise.\textsuperscript{1385}

On such an account, Francis’s Testament is less about a protest and more about a self-assessment, which aligns with Brooke’s autobiographical theory and Manselli’s statement about Francis wanting to be a good example for the order. Dalarun’s model of Francis suggests that Francis had regrets about his own personal inconsistencies as he attempted to practise his ideal of poverty. Francis regretted how he handled himself as a leader during the intense regularising process from 1221-1223. From Dalarun’s perspective, the Testament signalled Francis’s last attempt to be a good leader and example for the order to follow as its founder by providing an encouraging and human farewell.\textsuperscript{1386} Thus, the Testament illustrates a final, definitive letting go for Francis as he faced imminent death but remained hopeful about the order’s future. As Moorman describes it, citing Thomas’s Vita Secunda: “shortly before [Francis’s death], as he lay naked on the bare ground and looked back over his life, [Francis] said to the brethren: ‘I have done my duty, may Christ teach you yours.’”\textsuperscript{1387}

**Francis’s Humility in Terms of the Lifelong Learning Theory**

Thus far, I have provided alternative interpretations regarding Francis’s self-abasing practices and other damaging and controversial cases which cast doubt on whether he is a good example of Christian humility. In this final section of the chapter, I bring all of these findings together to demonstrate how they align with concepts of the lifelong learning theory and provide a different way to conceive of Francis’s humility. I conclude that Francis is a lifelong learner in his own right, which supports the fact that he is a positive and life-affirming example of Christian humility. I started by examining Francis’s self-abasing behaviours. These extreme practices jeopardise Francis’s example of Christian humility in light of the modern critiques. I argued that Francis did what was necessary to emulate the life of Christ as he understood it from the New Testament and kept his personal ideal of poverty in similar ways to other religious groups of his day, such as the Dominicans. I showed that Francis contextualised his gospel message by practising poverty in unique ways that went counter to the popular culture of the time, which was caught up in materialism and was disenchanted by the corruption of the church and the local clergy. I highlighted the reasons and

\textsuperscript{1384} Dalarun, 2002, 218.
\textsuperscript{1385} Dalarun, 2002, 218.
\textsuperscript{1386} Dalarun, 2002, 218.
\textsuperscript{1387} Moorman, 1950, 125.
commentary given by Thomas of Celano for Francis’s self-effacing behaviours which were that Francis had a keen understanding of himself and his own self-indulgent past as the son of a merchant. I contended that these self-deprecating behaviours were not the sum-total of Francis’s humility but served as a unique way for him to keep his ideal of poverty as Christ had commanded him. I concluded that nowhere does Francis mandate these sorts of personalised and extreme self-abasing behaviours for others in his order – they were his alone.

These findings align with the lifelong learning theory because Francis shows that he is open to change and improvements, flexible, and willing to creatively adapt his lifestyle, not only to follow Christ’s example but to live in such a way that influences and counters the damaging practices and moral direction of the culture in which he lived. Francis was able to see what needed to be done in his context and then find creative and necessary ways to act accordingly, first and foremost, for the sake of his emulation of Christ, but also to ensure the success and efficacy of his order in reaching others who needed to hear the gospel message and be brought back into the church. Francis was able to view his own story as part of a larger story within the social, religious and cultural structures that existed in his time. Francis’s behaviours represent his way of trying to offset the tense, divisive and negative relationship between the official church and the laity of his day to draw back the faithful to the church for its renewal and to bring about transformation for the wider society. On Thomas of Celano’s account, Francis demonstrates a high level of self-awareness because he understands the continuing effects of his former status and privilege as the son of a merchant. He knew himself to the extent that he found innovative and personal strategies that helped him stay faithful to his commitment to follow Christ in his way of humility by maintaining a radical ideal of individual poverty which also inspired others.

1388 Cf. In chapter four, for example, I discussed how lifelong learners are imaginative overall, open to changing and adapting what in the past would have been “clear-cut … and tried-and-tested ways of looking at things” (Crick, Broadfoot, and Claxton, 2004, 256). Instead, lifelong learners, like Francis “follow many lines of thought” to generate “new and original solutions to problems” which carry great value for their future and the future of others (cf. Pearse & Dunwoody, 2012, 65). In this regard, Francis showed an ability to have “divergent thinking” which meant that he repeatedly broke “out of the box” of his history or cultural context, adapting his personal ideals and possible limitations to experience “creative breakthroughs” which benefited him and others around him (cf. Pearse & Dunwoody, 2012, 65).

1389 Cf. In chapter four, I delineate that on the basis of the lifelong learning theory, a person is capable of “understanding changes in personal and social identity … as a potential for growth and ownership of one’s own life story” (Christensen, 2012, 1). The lifelong learner, as exemplified by Francis, is capable of “redesigning again and again, from scratch, the contours of [their] own life within the specific contexts in which [they] spend it, and in which [they] experience these contexts as ‘shapeable’ and designable” based on newly emerging and more dependable frames of reference (cf. Christensen, 2012, 1).

1390 Cf. In chapter four, I discussed the lifelong learning trait of self-awareness in terms of “strategic awareness” because the lifelong learner, much like Francis here, “likes trying out different approaches ... to see
Francis’s original ideal of poverty, as he understood it for himself and then for the order of lesser brothers, did not allow for the formal learning or theological education of its members. In Francis’s day, a person who was educated had an advantage and privilege over others. The order that Francis envisioned was not structured based on a person’s education, former titles and status, nor on the property that they had owned. Instead, Francis’s initial ideal was that they owned nothing, which included any sort of property, such as houses or books, as a way to show equity and unity within the order. However, because of the rapidly changing times during the high Middle Ages, with the rise of universities and the encroachment of outside religious groups and movements that were leading the faithful astray, Francis was forced to rethink and then adapt his initial vision about learning and education for the order. This was not an easy decision for Francis but was made easier by asking for the help and collaboration of others, like Anthony of Padua. These changes proved effective by propelling the work of the order forward into the future.

Francis’s actions and decisions demonstrate the lifelong learning theory as he enters into the process of making difficult decisions, and eventually adjusts his initial understanding about the place of learning and theological education for the order. He shows that he is flexible, open to learning new ways of thinking and adaptable, willing to set aside his original ideals, if necessary, to improve the effectiveness of his ministry. To this end, Francis asks for help from Anthony of Padua during these unsure and tumultuous times because he trusted Anthony and needed his guidance to make these changes within the order. Francis was reluctant, but he collaborates with Anthony for the good of the order. These cases in which Francis shows patterns that are commensurate with traits of a lifelong learner increase and intensify in the context of the controversies surrounding the writing of the Rules and Francis’s Testament.

The traditional interpretation, by Sabatier and Moorman, portrays Francis in a dramatic battle to save his ideal of poverty as he had initially envisioned it at the founding of his order. Some
in the church magisterium and the order, like Ugolino and Elias, were seeking to change Francis’s ideal to better fit their plans for the order after Francis died. The centre of this controversy resides in how to interpret Francis’s behaviours and involvement during the process of writing the Rules from 1220-1223. Sabatier and Moorman argue that the unapproved Earlier Rule (ER) of 1221 represented Francis’s true version of humility and the ideal of poverty that he wanted the order to carry forward after he died. The Later Rule of 1223 (LR) that was approved, omits Francis’s true wishes and original ideal of poverty, betraying him as the founder of the lesser brothers. On this account, the drama comes to a head when Francis writes his final Testament as the last attempt at gaining back his vision for the order which had gone regrettably awry. Thus, on this traditional account, Francis died a broken-hearted saint and perhaps an embittered founder, who failed to lead his order as he had envisioned it from the start.

However, the alternative or counter-narrative to this traditional one provides a different way to view these events and Francis’s behaviours in these later years. I argued, using textual evidence from the ER and the LR, that whatever arguments pit Francis as a single entity against others like Ugolino and Elias, do not add up. I showed that although Francis was a representative voice and author, well within his rights to influence the writing of the Rules as the order’s founder, that both the ER and the LR represent collaborative efforts across persons, places, and time. I asserted that the ER, in particular, sits as a collaborative “mess” of sorts that reflects a range of authors and styles with a desire to describe an overabundance of various practices and lifestyles performed over decades in countries dotting western Europe. I contended that the LR is a cleaned up, briefer and better version of the ER which helps to succinctly identify the core goals and practices of the order of lesser brothers. I concluded, as corroboration for this reading, that Francis’s ongoing instructions about respecting local priests and faithfully praying for the church reveal no sign that he opposed the church or ever fought against it.

Then, I turned to address Francis’s motivations in writing his Testament which, on the traditional interpretation, represents the final indictment against those who opposed him and his last woeful attempt at securing his initial ideal of poverty for the future of the order. I argued that, aligned with more recent research by Brooke and Manselli, Francis’s Testament made more sense when understood as an autobiographical farewell or blessing, or as Francis’s way of leaving his personal example of humility to those he loved. I concluded that this alternative interpretation of Francis related to the Rules and his Testament is best supported and corroborated by Dalarun’s reading of Francis’s behaviours and actions in these later years.

Dalarun portrays Francis as imperfect and all-too-human in the ways that he went about
leading the order through the difficult process of institutionalisation. Dalarun argues that Francis did his best at enduring the arduous transition as the founder of the order to merely its influential leader before his early and painful death. Dalarun contends that, although this season was more than difficult and fraught with inconsistencies, hesitations and perhaps some neglectful moments, Francis managed to navigate the order into the future by ostensibly letting go of it. In the end, Francis let go of his ideal of poverty as he had originally envisioned it by writing his Testament as the final vestige of that relinquishment.

On the basis of this analysis, I argue that Francis shows signs of lifelong learning. For example, when it came to writing an approved rule for the order, Francis knew that he was incapable of finishing such a task on his own. He knew that he needed help and that the rule had to reflect the differing practices of groups from other countries and cultures. Thus, the ER of 1221 is evidence of this collaborative effort which is then collated and revised into the LR of 1223. Although the process of crafting an acceptable rule was extremely difficult because of the varying voices and authors that needed to speak into it, including his own voice, Francis, and those who helped him, accomplished it. In this regard, Francis demonstrates a willingness to learn from and collaborate with others to a high level. Thus, as Dalarun contends, Francis’s Testament represents a way for him to not only let go of and relinquish his original ideal of poverty as he had envisioned it to be practised by the order, but also to memorialise it as his example of humility which would live on after he died.

At the start, Francis’s personal commitment to follow Christ’s example, by taking up and practising an ideal of radical poverty, is exemplary. When Francis applies and uses this original ideal of poverty as his founding principle for a new and official religious order in his day, this is creatively counter-cultural, adaptive and inspirational. Then, for Francis to witness the practice of his ideal, modelled after Christ, as the change agent for countless others and for renewal within the church, across different countries and cultures in such a short period, this is monumental. However, when Francis experienced all the success of this ideal of poverty, both personally and corporately, and then let go of it concerning how the order would operate after he died, this was the defining moment of Francis’s Christian humility. It is in this way that Francis stands out as the consummate lifelong learner. Francis, by God’s grace, let go of his most strongly held belief or frame of reference which was the ideal of poverty that he had envisioned for both himself and the order. Francis exchanged this frame of reference for another way to think about the order’s success as it went into

---

1393 Francis’s relinquishment described in these moments harkens back to Dunnington’s description of the notion of “cherished identities” in his rendering of Christian humility (cf. Dunnington, 2018, 44 and Dunnington, 2016, 29).
the future without him, trusting Christ with the outcomes.

Francis’s relinquishment of this cherished ideal allowed him to be transformed and paved the way for others to be transformed because the order of lesser brothers was able to continue as an important religious order for the renewal of the church. All of this points to patterns of lifelong learning during Francis’s most difficult moments in life. This alternative way to think about Francis’s controversial behaviours and episodes, interpreted through the lens of the lifelong learning theory, provides a way for Francis to stand out as a good, positive and life-affirming example of Christian humility – a model that promotes human flourishing and is useful today. In the final chapter of the thesis, I explore the implications of Christian humility conceived in terms of lifelong learning by applying it to a popular type of modern leadership theory called, servant leadership.

As I discussed in chapter four, Mezirow contends that transformation takes place in a person when they elaborate upon, expand or make changes to their existing frames of reference, at which point they either replace or amend them (2000, 19ff). In Francis’s case, he altered his point of view (i.e., a belief or a judgment) and his habits of the mind (i.e., individual or group ideologies) in relation to, for example his views of learning and education and then finally when it came to his ideal of poverty. For these reasons, Francis experienced human transformation over the course of his life until his death, paving the way for the order to continue into the future with his blessing. Francis showed that transformation of this nature is not easy for a person to achieve but by grace and trusting in Christ, even in the face of unforeseeable outcomes, it is possible.
Chapter 8: Modern Church Leadership & Lifelong Learning

Thesis Recap

My thesis from the start has been that a contemporary approach to learning, or lifelong learning and traits of the lifelong learner, provides an alternative way to think about Christian humility, which helps to evade the modern critiques that it is only self-abasing and unnecessary or dangerous for use in a modern society. To show how lifelong learning works, I introduced the medieval saint, Francis of Assisi, who is well-known for his Christian humility, but not without debate and controversy because, for one, he practised self-abasement, which throws into question whether Francis is a good example in light of the modern critiques. I also delineated other damaging cases and episodes that are presented in past Franciscan scholarship related to Francis’s erratic behaviours during the difficult period of writing the Rules, and then regarding his questionable motivations for writing his Testament, all of which cast doubt on Francis’s humility. To address these concerns about Francis, in the previous chapter, I argued on contextual grounds, with the support of recent findings in contemporary Franciscan scholarship, and finally using terms drawn from lifelong learning that Francis did exemplify a good and life-affirming model of Christian humility as he led his order before he died. In this final chapter, I explore the implications for such a view of Christian humility that Francis modelled by applying the lifelong learning theory to the study of Christian leadership within the modern church context, specifically as a replacement for or as an alternative to a popular, but as I show, problematic model of leadership called, servant leadership.

Servant Leadership in the Modern Church Context

The servant leadership theory has, by and large, become the leadership approach most widely associated with the virtue of humility (which I demonstrate later in the chapter) and the sort of leadership that the modern church has come to expect when it chooses and evaluates Christian leaders. In Sharon Drury’s Handbook of Leadership Theory for Church Leaders, she underscores that servant leadership is the approach near the top of the list when it comes to what churches consider to be good and effective church leadership. Drury contends that “servant leadership theory can hardly be rejected by a church built on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” who is “the ultimate example of servanthood”.

Sharon Drury, Handbook of Leadership Theory for Church Leaders (Vancouver: Regent University, 2003), 21.

1396 Drury, 2003, 22.
Servant leadership is not a term coined by a theologian or biblical scholar seeking to pattern a model of leadership after the life of Christ, who washed his disciples’ feet in John 13 and said in Mark 10 that “even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” These sorts of biblical associations, and their subsequent theological considerations, were attributed later to the servant leadership theory, which I discuss in subsequent sections. Rather, Robert Greenleaf was a business professional of 40 years at AT&T (an American telecommunications company) whose work, The Servant as Leader, argued for a type of leader who valued good stewardship and the notion of “nurturing employees” - wanting “to serve first” before the “conscious choice ... to aspire to lead”. Others across various disciplines have, for decades, continued to build upon Greenleaf’s initial philosophy in order “to clarify and operationalize” it for use in today’s world and in the church context.

Lifelong Learning — An Alternative to Servant Leadership

In the sections that follow, I continue this discussion concerning servant leadership, giving a more detailed overview of how it originated, describing some of its subsequent theoretical developments and offshoots over the past several decades. This general exploration provides the basis for understanding the types of theories and practices that have come to characterise servant leadership today. I show, through this analysis, how humility and other moral virtues, such as love and altruism came to be associated with servant leaders. This discussion includes how models of humble servant leadership surfaced in the realm of the modern church through the findings of biblical and Christian leadership studies. I point out that the servant leadership theory has gone mostly unchallenged and unquestioned in these studies, because to argue against such a trusted, biblical model of leadership is akin to heresy both inside and outside the church. In this regard, to conclude the first part of the chapter, I elucidate some of the critiques of servant leadership that are found in contemporary literature, for example, that the model seems outdated, inherently biased

---

1397 Mk. 10:45 (ESVUK, italics added).
1400 Sarah Elaine Eaton and Amy Burns, eds., Women Negotiating Life in the Academy: A Canadian Perspective (Singapore: Springer Publishing, 2020), 19, DOI.org/10.1007/978-981-15-3114-9, Accessed September 3, 2020. Eaton and Burns bring together an interesting volume on an array of relevant topics (i.e., women’s increasing contributions to STEM or the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) from the perspective of current Canadian educators and scholars, such as Dianne Gereluk and Karen Ragoonaden. Of particular interest for this chapter is Eaton’s article wherein she discusses the servant leadership theory and its complexities related to education and life in the modern world. See “Challenging and Critiquing Notions of Servant Leadership: Lessons from My Mother”, 15-24.
against women and minorities, and empirically unsubstantiated.

Next, on the basis of these critiques, I introduce two leadership frameworks discussed in contemporary leadership studies. The first is considered an outdated approach, called the “industrial era paradigm” of leadership, which depicts leadership as merely “good management” with a “great man or woman” at the helm of a surviving and growing organisation. Some leadership theorists, such as Joseph Rost, argue that this old leadership paradigm derives historically from the industrial era in the West, a point which I explain in some detail. The second approach is termed the “post-industrial paradigm” of leadership and is touted as “leadership for the twenty-first century.” To set up and further corroborate my theory about lifelong learning as an alternative model to the servant leadership theory for the church context, I highlight the ways in which lifelong learning aligns with this post-industrial conception of leadership. I conclude that a twenty-first century alternative to the mostly unchallenged, outdated and perplexing notions of servant leadership is Christian leadership that is conceived in terms of the lifelong learning theory as it was exemplified by the life and humility of Francis.

An Overview of the Servant Leadership Theory

Some contemporary scholars assert that “leadership is one of the most comprehensively researched social influence processes in the behavioral sciences”. This is evidenced by the sheer volume of literature and research, across disciplines, on the topic and practice of leadership over the past fifty years. The fascination with leadership studies dates back to the early 1900s. By the 1930s it was believed that “the success of all economic, political, and organizational systems depended on the effective and efficient guidance of the leaders of these systems”. In other words, “a critical factor to understanding the success of an organization … is to study its leaders”, and churches have followed suit. As previously mentioned, my focus in this chapter centres on

---

1401 Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-first Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 1993), 91. Rost argues repeatedly against such notions of leadership for the twenty-first century world but then admits that he too was “taken in just like everyone else” by such subversive models since at least the 1980s (91). Although Rost does not explicitly argue that the old industrial approach to leadership is biased towards women and ethnic minorities, this conclusion is not a difficult one, nor is it an outrageous conceptual leap to make.


1404 Rost, 1993, 99. Rost argues that to capture the complexities inherent to leadership, “scholars and practitioners since about 1910 (perhaps longer) have tried to develop a reality-based understanding of leadership in groups, organizations, and societies” (99). However, before stating this, Rost explores the development of ideas related to leadership dating back as far as the early 1600s (38).

1405 Parris & Peachey, 2013, 377.

1406 Parris & Peachey, 2013, 377. Leadership research, across disciplines is vast and controversial. Rost provides
the analysis and critique of a leadership theory that was conceived in the 1970s by Robert Greenleaf (1904-1990), called “servant leadership”.\footnote{Greenleaf, 2007, 79.}

Greenleaf writes that the idea for The Servant as Leader came to him from a variety of places, but most poignantly “out of reading Hermann Hesse’s Journey to the East.”\footnote{Robert F. Greenleaf, “The Servant as Leader” in Corporate Ethics and Corporate Governance, eds. Walther Zimmerli, Klaus Richter, and Markus Holzinger (London: Springer Publishing, 2007), 79-85, 79. Hermann Hesse’s The Journey to the East was first published in 1932, trans. Hilda Rodner (London: MacMillan, 2013) and has since been translated into many languages.} This epiphanic episode in Greenleaf’s life has been told and retold throughout the literature on servant leadership. Hesse’s story goes that “a band of men” on some sort of mythical journey sponsored by an unnamed order had among their party a “central figure” named Leo.\footnote{Greenleaf, 2007, 79.} Leo was “the servant” of the group and as such did “their menial chores” while also acting as the one who sustained the band through difficulties along the journey “with his spirit and his song”.\footnote{Greenleaf, 2007, 79.} At the point of Leo’s disappearance, “the group falls into disarray and the journey is abandoned”.\footnote{Greenleaf, 2007, 79.} Eventually, as Greenleaf tells it, the narrator of the story, who was also part of the original group of travellers, “finds Leo” only to discover that Leo was the “titular head of the order” who sent the men out on the journey in the first place.\footnote{Greenleaf, 2007, 79.} Leo, by his very nature, was considered the “guiding spirit and a great and noble leader” for the order.\footnote{Greenleaf, 2007, 83.}

Greenleaf makes it clear that Leo is his main muse in describing the servant leadership philosophy that he initially puts forth through an “intuitive insight”, writing that “the servant-leader is servant first”, and begins with the natural impulse to serve before making any conscious choice to aspire to lead and not the other way around.\footnote{Greenleaf, 2007, 83.} For Greenleaf, a person who is a servant first causes others around them to “freely respond” and to naturally choose the servant leader because they

\[\text{\footnote{\textcopyright 2022 American Psychological Association. All rights reserved.}}\]
have “proven” themselves to be trustworthy. Greenleaf contends that the test for determining effective servant leadership is to ask the questions: “do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” Greenleaf was looking for a way to create a more “caring society” than what he saw around him at the time of his first writing – a society built on servant leadership that, in turn, fortifies the institutions within this society, which need change. Based on this vision, Greenleaf believed that “in the future, the only truly viable institutions will be those that are predominantly servant-led”. Subsequently, Greenleaf states that his “hope for the future” rests on “the legions of deprived and unsophisticated people” among whom “are many true servants who will lead, and that most of these can learn to discriminate among those who presume to serve them and identify the true servants whom they will follow”. Greenleaf’s non-evidence-based servant leadership theory that taps into “the natural feeling one gets to serve” has triggered a myriad of contemporary studies, which have produced no dearth of models, theories, conceptual frameworks, attributes and quantitative measures.

Theoretical Frameworks for Servant Leadership

As some have noted, servant leadership theory, with its “emphasis on service to others and recognition that the role of organizations is to create people who can build a better tomorrow”, resonates with both scholars and practitioners alike who wish to create “a viable leadership theory to help resolve the challenges of the twenty-first century”. These scholars, like others in contemporary leadership studies, believe that “great leaders” are the hope for “new directions” in a thriving modern society. However, these same scholars denote how Greenleaf’s conceptualisation of servant leadership, as promising as it initially seemed, was only meant “as a way of life”, a philosophy, and not as an academic treatise on leadership, nor as “a how-to-do-it manual”. Thus, servant leadership as Greenleaf had conceived it was, “under-defined”, leaving “the researcher, student, or practitioner to ponder exactly what servant leadership theory is”.

---

1416 Greenleaf, 2007, 81. See also Greenleaf, 1977, 3.
1417 Greenleaf, 1977, 6.
1419 Greenleaf, 2007, 81.
1420 Greenleaf, 2007, 84.
1422 Parris & Peachey, 2013, 378.
1423 Parris & Peachey, 2013, 378. See also Greenleaf, 1977, 49.
1424 Parris & Peachey, 2013, 380.
For reasons like these, Greenleaf himself predicted that servant leadership would be difficult to “apply and operationalize” for any setting.\textsuperscript{1425} However, Greenleaf’s concern and prediction have not deterred the ongoing and perplexing “clarifying” descriptions and theoretical frameworks which have surfaced over roughly the past three decades. In this regard, there are more than a few scholars who argue that their list of qualities and measures aptly define the servant leadership theory as Greenleaf had envisioned it. Larry Spears and James Laub remain at the forefront of the servant leadership studies because their definitions and characterisations of what a servant leader is remain influential in the literature on the topic across disciplines.

In short, Spears, after working seventeen years for the Greenleaf Foundation, formulated ten characteristics that he believes sum up Greenleaf’s writings on servant leadership.\textsuperscript{1426} Spears’s ten traits include, listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, philosophy, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.\textsuperscript{1427} Laub, on the other hand, created an “Organizational Leadership Assessment” (OLA), to be used for quantitative research and analysis and designed to test the health of an organisation, which delineates six key variables of a well-run, servant-led organisation. On Laub’s account, servant leadership is best understood as, 1) valuing people, by believing, serving, and nonjudgmentally listening to them, 2) developing people, by providing learning, growth, encouragement and affirmation, 3) building community, by developing strong collaborative and personal relationships, 4) displaying authenticity, by being open, accountable, and willing to learn from others, 5) providing leadership, by foreseeing the future, taking initiative, and establishing goals, and 6) sharing leadership by facilitating and sharing power.\textsuperscript{1428} In light of these foundational studies, other arguments have been developed.

To mention a few, Russell and Stone’s review elicited nine functional attributes, or operative qualities and distinctive characteristics of servant leaders, which include vision, honesty, integrity,

\textsuperscript{1425} Parris & Peachey, 2013, 378.
trust, service, modelling, pioneering, appreciation of others, and empowerment. Also, Russell and Stone found eleven accompanying attributes, which are interrelated, and which support the other nine core attributes listed above - these include communication, credibility, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, persuasion, listening, encouragement, teaching, and delegation. Barbuto and Wheeler helped to develop further quantitative data and measurable scales that support the servant leadership theory by devising five factors, altruistic calling, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, wisdom, and organisational stewardship.

Lists like these are samples only of what is present in contemporary leadership studies related to defining the behaviour of a servant leader or conceptually framing the servant leadership theory for today’s world. One scholar concluded that “the spirit of servant leadership [is] vague” and undefinable, which is of great strategic advantage for bringing people to annual conferences year after year “to figure out what the hell [it] is”. Each year, new studies are seeking to “refine” the traits and concepts associated with the servant leadership theory. However, what has become central to these studies is the notion that “ethics, virtues, and morality” are important supporting pillars for any conceptual frameworks depicting the servant leadership theory.

**Humility & Servant Leadership**

As early as the 1990s, scholars began to attach notions of moral virtue to Greenleaf’s servant leadership theory. Virtuous and humble servant leaders were set in theoretical opposition to the potential hubris that was inherent to the “charismatic effects” of other types of leaders, who might

---


1434 Parris & Peachey’s work (2013) is a good example of this “refining” because they pull together five factors that they contend exemplify what servant leadership is.

1435 Parris & Peachey, 2013, 377.

1436 Jill W. Graham, “Servant-Leadership in Organizations: Inspirational and Moral,” *Leadership Quarterly*, 2.2 (1991): 105-119. Graham’s concern was that charismatic leadership which was a popular theory at the time might need some sort of moral corrective to the effects of pride and power – i.e., moral virtues.
use excessive power or dominance over subordinates to achieve their goals. Most notable for attaching moral virtues to servant leadership is Kathleen Patterson, who views servant leaders as those who focus primarily on their followers rather than organisational concerns. For Patterson, servant leaders are virtuous in their attitudes and moral behaviours towards their followers in seven ways, in that they show the cornerstone virtue of love, then humility, altruism, vision, trust, empowerment and lastly, service. Patterson argues that “servant leadership is based on love”, from which other virtues, such as humility, might be exhibited as the leader resists keeping “track of followers’ wrongs”. However, Patterson maintains that the virtue of humility remains significantly high and vital to most models of servant leadership in the literature over the last several decades. Adding support to this, in their “examination of the variety of concepts used to describe servant leadership”, Hale & Fields have concluded that humility sits atop most of the studies that they have reviewed.

For Hale & Fields, humility is then followed by an extensive list of qualities and measures, which includes:

- relational power
- service orientation
- follower development
- encouragement of follower autonomy
- altruistic calling
- emotional healing
- persuasive mapping
- wisdom
- organizational stewardship
- moral love
- vision
- trust
- service (behavior)
- follower empowerment
- influence
- credibility
- voluntary subordination
- authentic self
- covenantal relationship with followers
- responsible morality
- transcendent spirituality
- transforming influence
- creating value for the community
- conceptual skills
- helping subordinates grow and succeed
- putting subordinates first
- behaving ethically

However, Hale & Fields raise three central descriptors, which they argue, were “originally employed

---

1438 Patterson, 2003, 2.
1440 Studies like Patterson’s emerged considering other cultural viewpoints. For example, see Pekerti’s and Senjaya’s list of virtuous traits for servant leaders (from a cross-cultural perspective): voluntary subordination and authentic self (humility); covenantal relationship (service to followers); responsible morality; transcendent spirituality and transforming influence. A.A. Pekerti & S. Sendjaya, “Exploring servant leadership across cultures: comparative study in Australia and Indonesia,” The International Journal of Human Resource Management 21.5 (2010): 754-780.
by Greenleaf consistently”. These “cornerstones of servant leadership” are humility, service and vision. For Hale & Fields, humility is exemplified when the servant leader “put[s] the success of followers ahead of [their] personal gain”. Service applies to followers of an organization, which may include “service orientation, follower development, organizational stewardship, follower empowerment, covenantal relationship, responsible morality, helping followers grow, and putting followers first”. Lastly, vision means that a servant leader has “foresight combined with the ability to communicate ... and influence followers in developing a shared vision for an organization”. My aim in this section was to show how the virtues, specifically the moral virtue of humility, came to be associated with the servant leadership theory. Next, I explore research in contemporary Christian leadership studies which lay claim to servant leadership as uniquely tethered to a Judeo-Christian worldview and tradition.

**Christianising Servant Leadership**

Some scholars argue that, from its inception, Greenleaf’s servant leadership theory has been tied to Judeo-Christian tradition. Frick’s research shows that Greenleaf’s background in Quakerism (also called the “Society of Friends”) influences much of the servant leadership philosophy. For example, when Greenleaf claims that “everything begins with the individual”, he is espousing “an old thought in Protestant history”, which points to a “scripture-based but anti-clerical” type of society wherein “you make everyone a leader”. This Quaker ideal translates into “a proven way of making decisions that honours all voices” leading to group “consensus”. Moving a group or organisation towards consensus, for Greenleaf, also meant employing strategies of persuasion like “silence, listening, and a reliance on spirit as expressed through individual insight”. Greenleaf’s infusion of Quaker ideals into his servant leadership theory comes from his use of the writings of eighteenth-century Quaker, John Woolman (1720-1772), who in his *spiritual autobiography*

---

1452 Frick, 2004, 129.
describes how he came to oppose slavery in his day.”

As early as the 1990s, Christian education studies began centralising Jesus Christ as the main exemplar and supreme initiator of the servant leadership theory, citing his words from Matthew 20:28 where he tells his disciples that he came “to serve” and not to be served. By the turn of the century, servant leadership was heralded as “biblically based and modeled after Jesus Christ” and “not only as the biblical model for leadership, but also as a rallying cry for recruiting and training Christian leaders”. Servant leadership as it is imbied in the person of Jesus was labelled as “paradoxical” because a leader “increased their potential to influence through intentional vulnerability and voluntary humility” which was demonstrated by Jesus, who ‘made himself nothing, taking on the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross.’. Scholars argue that to empty the self like Jesus did does not diminish, but rather greatly enhances a person’s “leadership position”. Others point to Jesus’s act of washing his disciples’ feet in John 13, asserting that this episode alone provides ample exemplary proof that serving and leadership go hand in hand in the Christian religion.

Later studies have continued this trend, providing support for servant leadership, by calling “Jesus of Nazareth ... the model servant-leader” after the pattern of Moses in ancient Hebrew tradition. Bekker’s study argues that servant leadership has always been the standard leadership

---

1457 Wong & Page, 2003, 2. See also, Phil. 2:5-8 wherein Paul writes, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (ESVUK). It is beyond the scope to provide exegesis for these sorts of controversial texts, but Stephen E. Fowl in Philippians (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) mentions how difficult Philippians 2 is to interpret – second only to John 1 (13). See also, Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., Where Christology began: Essays on Philippians 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998). And, Ralph P. Martin, Carmen Christi: Philippians ii 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).
model across four main religious traditions (i.e., Judaism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism).\textsuperscript{1461} He asserts that “Jesus radicalized this notion of leading as service with the ultimate act of self-sacrifice … culminating [in] his atoning … death as the central focus for Christian scholars and practitioners in the ongoing quest to find an effective and moral model for leadership”.\textsuperscript{1462} Bekker adds descriptors like “voluntary abasement, service, humility, and obedience” to the Christian “vision of service-oriented leadership”, which, Bekker claims, replaces the first-century Roman models by providing a theory that is “rooted in radical humility and common mutuality”.\textsuperscript{1463} Bekker concludes that “servant leadership has the capacity to remind … believers in [these] four religions of the moral and transformative possibilities of leadership that is focused on the follower and which is measured in the positive change on their lives.”\textsuperscript{1464}

**Servant Leadership in Biblical Studies**

Biblical scholar, Steven Crowther has sought to unequivocally name servant leadership as the capstone theory expressed throughout much of the Old and New Testaments.\textsuperscript{1465} Crowther claims that “the ideas and concepts for servant leadership have been around for centuries in different forms”, including those found in the writings of Aristotle and Aquinas.\textsuperscript{1466} Drawing from the research findings of Patterson and the virtues of servant leadership such as love, humility, altruism, trust and service, Crowther seeks to root these concepts in a biblical worldview.\textsuperscript{1467} Crowther’s methodology is to take Patterson’s virtue theory of servant leadership and analyse it in a contemporary context, through the lens of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, looking for the nuances and confirming, critiquing or challenging what emerges from these comparisons.\textsuperscript{1468} Crowther writes that “thinking theologically … from the perspective of divine intention and prerogative” (i.e., from above) rather than from an anthropological view from below, in cooperation with the science of organizational leadership, help to show how servant leadership theory applies to multiple contexts of the twenty-first century, including the church, government, military, non-profits, education and the world of business.\textsuperscript{1469}
Crowther plods from one book of the Bible to another to assert that “biblical constructs and designs fit well with the overall concept of servant leadership”, suggesting “a finely nuanced way of leadership” that Crowther initially calls “biblical servant leadership”. Crowther draws a distinction in biblical leadership that calls for all types of leaders including, for example, “pioneers” and “builders” based on Paul’s and Apollos’s complementarian relationship in the New Testament. A pioneer on Crowther’s biblical leadership model is defined as “both architect and chief engineer” (i.e., Paul) who “goes in and establishes the foundation” first in any given church or business context, for example, while the builder or builders provide support and needed help throughout early stages in the process of institutionalisation, change, growth or renewal. The builder-type leaders (i.e., Apollos) are called upon to move the work onwards and into the future – with the ability “to build” off the foundation laid by the pioneer through this team approach.

Crowther’s biblical leadership theory, defined in these terms, moves away from explicit descriptors, like “servant”, in favour of a general account of biblical leadership on which various monikers might conceptually hang, including Patterson’s virtues of love, humility, altruism, trust and service. Such a generalised leadership model “expands” and subsumes Greenleaf’s servant leadership theory without necessarily taking on unneeded baggage associated with a singular titular moniker like “servant”. On this basis, Crowther calls for a “new model” of biblical leadership, which “includes serving and concepts of servant leadership”, while simultaneously informing, critiquing, and expanding these concepts such that they become peripheral rather than central. Crowther concludes that “servant leadership has served our organizations and churches well” which suggests that the time has come to leave it behind.

I have attempted in the previous sections to provide an overview of the servant leadership theory with the background as to its origins from the mind of businessman, Robert Greenleaf, who envisioned a better society than the one he saw in the 1970s in the United States. In light of Greenleaf’s general philosophy of serving and “nurturing employees”, I examined, using

---

1470 Crowther, 2018, 163 (Italics added).
1471 Crowther, 2018, 161ff. It is beyond the scope to enter the debates regarding Paul and Apollos – and the dynamics of their working relationship in the early church. See Acts 19:1 and what Paul writes, “for when one says, ‘I follow Paul’, and another, ‘I follow Apollos’, are you not being merely human? What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each” (1 Cor. 3:4-5, ESVUK). See also, “Paul and Apollos—Colleagues Or Rivals?” by Donald P. Ker, Journal for the Study of the New Testament 77 (2000): 75-97. Ker argues that while Paul seems to say that he and Apollos worked in collaboration, “side by side” that in the end, Paul “undermines” Apollos (96).
1472 Crowther, 2018, 162.
1473 Crowther, 2018, 161-162 and 111.
1474 Crowther, 2018, 163-164.
1475 Crowther, 2018, 163.
1476 Crowther, 2018, 163.
contemporary literature, how such “a way of life” (by the 1990s) was later developed by devising a variety of extensive theoretical frameworks, traits, and quantitative measures and scales. Then, I highlighted the work of Kathleen Patterson, whereby she attached moral virtues to the servant leadership theory, namely love, humility, altruism, trust, and service. I examined the research of Hale & Fields to show that, in terms of servant leadership, humility is at the top of the list of virtues that best describes it. I demonstrated how other studies have expanded upon Patterson’s virtue ethics, including recent studies in Christian leadership. In the next section, I explain some of the critiques of the servant leadership theory in contemporary scholarship. These objections are important to discuss because I argue for an alternative way to conceive of Christian leadership today which draws upon concepts from the lifelong learning theory.

**Critiques of the Servant Leadership Theory**

Until recently, servant leadership has, by and large, gone unchallenged and unquestioned since its inception in the 1970s. This oversight seems puzzling, given the fact that the servant leadership theory, by 2005, had been “cited more than twenty-one thousand times in the Social Science Index” alone.1477 By the turn of the twenty-first century, some scholars, such as Yvonne Bradley began questioning the viability of “the essential qualities in a biblical version of servant-leadership” that are supposedly useful for today’s world.1478 Bradley did not deny that the servant leadership theory was “a very noble idea”, but she wondered how such a model might look for managers in the real world who wished to practise it.1479 This potential impracticality of the servant leadership theory was one of the first steps at moving away from the model, but at the time, this worry fell by the wayside.1480 Eventually, however, other researchers began apologising less for their concerns about servant leadership and instead began to honestly assess its appropriateness as a theory for living and working in a contemporary context.

For example, Deborah Eicher-Catt offers a feminist interpretation of servant leadership by questioning the theory’s common taglines such as, “touted by many managerial elites” or “a genderless approach” to good leading.1481 She asserts that servant leadership was devised with “overriding masculine connotations stemming from religious, patriarchal ideology” and should not

---

1479 Bradley, 1999, 44.
1480 Bradley, 1999, 44.
be considered “innocent speech” with its many “historically-admired religious meanings and spiritual representations”.¹⁴⁸² For this and other reasons, Eicher-Catt made a decided step away from servant leadership, calling it “a leadership myth”, and one that could be “easily appropriated to serve political ends”, concluding that it “prescribes a pre-given androcentric ethos” making it impossible to “de-gender or demasculinize”.¹⁴⁸³ Soon after, other critiques emerged in the literature demonstrating that “much of the research ... [in] servant leadership is based on opinion, case study, and emotional arguments ... with limited ... and minimal critique”.¹⁴⁸⁴ A growing number of critics began pointing out that the newer “values-based approaches”, such as transforming leadership which included servant leadership, contained “unchallenged assumptions”.¹⁴⁸⁵ Some of these unchallenged assumptions were that servant leadership set up impossible examples to emulate, like Jesus Christ, and that these religious underpinnings made it “tantamount to heresy” for those who dared to oppose it - calling for empirical proof for the servant leadership theory’s future and credibility.¹⁴⁸⁶

Empirical research is beginning to report findings that support the above critiques about the servant leadership theory and the underlying presuppositions upon which it rests. One such study sought to “problematise servant leadership” by undertaking an analysis (through quantifiable in-depth interviews) of a fifty-year-old Asian male senior manager in Australia and his employees who

¹⁴⁸² Eicher-Catt, 2005, 23.
¹⁴⁸³ Eicher-Catt, 2005, 23. See also, Kae Reynolds, “Servant-Leadership: A Feminist Perspective,” The International Journal of Servant Leadership 10.1 (2016): 33-64. Reynolds expresses many of the same concerns as Eicher-Catt, however, Reynolds concludes that “servant-leadership espouses a non-hierarchical, participative approach to defining organizational objectives and ethics that recognizes and values the subjectivity and situatedness of organizational members. Feminist critique and a gender perspective can also inform servant-leadership through the appeal to integrate the female experience with male experience, subordinated experience with dominant experience” (57). Thus, Reynolds maintains optimism about servant leadership theory – trusting the spirit of the movement as equitable towards all, inviting the scholarly community to continue a progressive shaping of the theory for modern times.
¹⁴⁸⁵ Minnis & Callahan, 2010, 2. It is beyond the scope to enter the debates regarding transformational leadership theory, devised by James MacGregor Burns in 1978. Over the last few decades, transformational leadership, not unlike servant leadership, has been taken up by a range of disciplines from business to Christian leadership theory. Depending on which study, the basic concepts of transformational leadership fall into (but are not limited to) six dimensions which include “articulating a vision, intellectual stimulation, high performance expectations, fostering collaboration, providing an appropriate role model, and providing individual support”. Part of Burn’s research was to show a distinction between “transactional leadership” or a leader-follower relationship of “give and take” versus transforming leaders who, by their authentic personality and skills are able to bring about change through their example and a clear articulation of their vision with challenging but attainable goals through which to attain it. Thus, transformational leaders, unlike transactional leaders tend to be idealised as moral exemplars who work towards outcomes that could benefit the whole community. Cf. Burns, Leadership (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 270ff.
were all white males ranging in age from 30s-50s. The outcomes of this experiment are specific to and limited by the context. The findings demonstrate that the practice of servant leadership is “co-constructed” by both leaders and followers to the extent that it works or fails. For example, the senior manager, in several ways and continually (throughout data collection) showed “humility, selflessness and compassion”, which are “venerated in servant leadership theory”. However, what seemed obvious to the researcher was that this service was not rewarded in ways that the servant leadership theory promises.

The manager’s “servant leadership behaviours were rendered ‘illegible’ as acts of leadership [and] more readily interpreted as his appropriate deference to white employees, rather than valiant acts of selflessness”. Most of the employees (except for one) “centred their identities as the protagonists of the organisational narrative within the assumption that white people are the rightful leaders and beneficiaries of the corporate arena”. The study points to the fact that “followers are not homogenous blank slates, who statically sit within organisational hierarchies”. Rather, followership is “dynamic [and] socially constructed” with subjectivity “that may accede or resist leadership” which suggests “that servant leadership needs to account for a more complex and nuanced view of followership that is invariably shaped by systems” such as those of domination maintained by processes of differentiation. In light of the findings in this study, servant leadership seems unlikely to be “unilaterally imbued into followers” as the theory purports, but rather is “part of an ongoing process of identity co-construction”.

What remains at the forefront of these critiques of servant leadership is the apparent trepidation that scholars feel as they attempt to assess the viability of servant leadership in the first place. Sarah Eaton denotes “how servant leadership has evolved to have an almost pathological

---

1487 Helena Lui, “Just the Servant: An Intersectional Critique of Servant Leadership,” *Journal of Business Ethics* (2019): 1099-1112, 1101. This study is from the point of view of intersectionality which is an evolving concept and debated in the literature. Intersectionality broadly refers to a recognition of the existence of ‘complex, irreducible … and variable effects’ which ensue at the intersection of multiple axes of differentiation, i.e., economic, political cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential (1101). It is beyond the scope to say more about intersectionality. Research of this sort aims at a focused sensitivity “to the diverse makeup within each socially constructed group” (1101).
1488 Lui, 2019, 1108.
1489 Lui, 2019, 1108.
1490 Lui, 2019, 1108.
1491 Lui, 2019, 1108.
1492 Lui, 2019, 1108.
1493 Lui, 2019, 1108.
1494 Lui, 2019, 1108.
1495 Lui, 2019, 1108.
following, but without deep scholarly considerations of the limitations of [the] approach”. Eaton asserts that servant leadership has become “a “romanticized approach [to leadership] that fails to consider the aspects of servitude such as the subjugation of those who serve because they have no other choice”. For Eaton, “the general idea of servant leadership makes sense ... on a soul-level” but still, she “wrestles with it”. She recounts parts of her childhood, growing up in England with a single mother who worked as a servant for a large estate. Eaton’s memories from this time centre around her mother’s mantra, “Don’t be a servant--get an education and have a better life.” Eaton highlights, similar to Eicher-Catt, that servant leadership and its proponents presume a place of power or influence in such a way as to render the theory, for a vast number of people, inaccessible, irrelevant or perhaps anathema.

Then, Eaton turns to other concerns such as “the notion of servant leadership [as] almost sacrosanct in [the] field of educational leadership” today which means that for a scholar not to subscribe to it “is tantamount to heresy”. Eaton argues that to challenge and critique servant leadership implies “an endorsement of unethical or exploitative leadership” giving such critics “the fear of becoming a pariah” in their professional learning communities. She asserts that for a theory such as servant leadership to be exempt from challenge or critique is itself something to be feared, for example in the realm of education. Eaton writes, “we cannot engage in critical reflection if we insist on following a particular school of thought without scrutiny of the ideas stemming from it”. For this reason, Eaton concludes that academics across disciplines are called upon “to think deeply about what it means to be a leader, an educator, and a scholar”, maintaining, if necessary, the “struggle with a notion of servant leadership that has been espoused almost without criticism ... [and] popularized by white men who never lived a life of service” to begin with.

I contend that what Eicher-Catt, Eaton, Lui and others have underscored above is that servant leadership is implicitly, if not structurally, biased in terms of gender or minority groups in society because it presumes that everyone starts from positions of power or status that requires

---

1497 Eaton, 2020, 15.
1498 Eaton, 2020, 18.
1499 Eaton, 2020, 18 (italics added).
1500 Eaton, 2020, 18.
1501 Eaton, 2020, 18.
1502 Eaton, 2020, 18.
1503 Eaton, 2020, 19.
1504 Eaton, 2020, 19.
1505 Eaton, 2020, 22.
them to use humility or to be humble in the first place. However, the reality which exists in today’s world is that many people start in or come from a social or economic position of subordination or discrimination that needs to be overcome and challenged.\textsuperscript{1506} In other words, a theory like servant leadership seems to be a “myth” (like Eicher-Catt labels it) because it presumes that a leader’s main issue is their pride or a sense of their own power and entitlement that need to be subdued or lessened by serving others.\textsuperscript{1507} Yet, when it comes to women, the poor or certain ethnicities, pride is not necessarily a luxury that they are culturally or socially afforded (unlike white men, for example). These groups might be considered structurally subordinated to others already. Thus, using the servant leadership theory to instruct women or black people to serve others reinforces these structurally subversive paradigms and pushes people deeper into a state of oppression or subordination which helps to maintain a societal status quo. Instead, a leadership model that is viable and relevant should help all people in a given society gain their appropriate level of authority or see themselves as capable of leading in the first place. I conclude, based on these types of critiques, that servant leadership takes for granted masculine power and then attempts to soften it, which does not structurally allow for the possibility that leaders might be women or disempowered minority groups. It excludes the other half of a modern and diverse society to implicitly set up a world in which these marginalised groups cannot and will not be leaders because the reigning paradigm does not permit it or comprehend it.

In the next section, to continue setting up my theory about lifelong learning as a good alternative to or replacement for servant leadership in the modern church context, I discuss two leadership frameworks (as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter). The first is called the “industrial era paradigm”.\textsuperscript{1508} As I explain, Joseph Rost contends that the industrial era paradigm of leadership is outdated and representative of the confusing and male-dominated theories that have emerged since the beginning of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{1509} The second framework, what Rost calls the post-industrial era or the “twenty-first century paradigm” of leadership, represents a contemporary or updated approach to understanding the complicated dynamics involved in the relationship between leaders and followers in today’s modern world.\textsuperscript{1510} As I assert below, the servant leadership theory aligns with this industrial era leadership framework which, much like the critiques already delineated, makes it outdated and problematic. By contrast, I argue that concepts

\textsuperscript{1506} Eicher-Catt, 2005, 23. I am expounding upon Eicher-Catt’s claim that it seems impossible to “de-masculinize” servant leadership.
\textsuperscript{1507} Eicher-Catt, 2005, 23.
\textsuperscript{1508} Rost, 1993, 91.
\textsuperscript{1509} Rost, 1993, 27.
\textsuperscript{1510} Rost, 1993, 102.
and traits from the lifelong learning theory fit well and make sense within the twenty-first century approach to leadership, especially in the church.

**Two Leadership Frameworks**

**The Industrial Era Paradigm**

In the west, industrial era leadership, since roughly 1910, has obtained an unfortunate reputation in contemporary literature for being “confusing, discrepant, disorganized, and unintegrated”. However, some researchers see one underlying theme among all the clutter of the twentieth-century data – the consistent notion that “leadership is management”. The “hodgepodge” of theories in the industrial era across disciplines – whether defining, describing or modelling leadership tends to be “hierarchical, linear, and pragmatic ... [making them] all very management oriented”. Each of these theories amounts to different ways of saying the same thing, which is that good leadership is “good management” for the successful outcomes of organisations and individuals in almost any context.

Moreover, these management models tend to be “representative of male, even macho, characteristics that contain heroic, folkloric, Old West, and Hollywood images of what males do as leaders”. As scholars trace concepts and strategies of leadership throughout the industrial era, they generally start with “the great man theory” or the notion that all good managers are not good men but rather “great men”. This great man theory was later expanded to include women, but initially after both World Wars was considered exclusively for men. These great men who humbly serve, for example in the industrial era, also have to be great organisers with “desirable traits ... to get the job done” for effective and efficient organisations wherein employees are motivated to “achieve stated goals” towards some sort of “excellence”. The great man theory and subsequently others like it continue to influence the literature and are labelled by some scholars as the “periphery of leadership”.

What this means is that leadership models which fit into the industrial era paradigm, “have

---

1512 Rost, 1993, 91.
1513 Rost, 1993, 27 (italics added).
1514 Rost, 1993, 27.
1515 Rost, 1993, 27.
1516 Rost, 1993, 27.
1517 Rost, 1993, 26.
1518 Rost, 1993, 74.
1519 Rost, 1993, 2-6.
been almost totally concerned with ... traits, personality characteristics, ... nurture issues, greatness, group facilitation, goal attainment, effectiveness, contingencies, situations, goodness, style and, above all, how to manage an organization better”. This periphery “syndrome” is pervasive, easily accounting for 90 per cent of what has been written about leadership throughout the twentieth century with little to no focus on “the nature of leadership [or] the substance of what leadership actually is”, all of which leaves proponents of the industrial era paradigm unclear as to “what they mean by the word leadership”. Based on this brief overview and given the critiques already outlined, I conclude that servant leadership is an example of the types of leadership theories categorised in this outdated, hierarchical and male-dominated industrial era approach. Moreover, similar to the confusing “peripheral content” that seems inherent to these “great manager” theories of the industrial era, servant leadership is also replete with concepts and traits which either say too much or too little about what it is and how it might be useful.

The Twenty-First Century Paradigm

In a 2005 interview, Rost noted that “people in the Western world ... are less willing to play a follower role [to] do what other people say they should do”. Rather, says Rost, people are more interested in participating in “a process that gives them some influence”. Although in the early and middle part of the twentieth century people seemed generally submissive, the times have changed “dramatically”. These changes are reflected in resistance to or rejection of “a model of leadership that emphasizes the top person or the one person doing leadership” while others simply follow or obey. Rost goes on to say that new paradigms are developing in “the natural sciences, psychology and religion” which indicates a pushing away from “the old language and the old assumptions” about leadership. Other scholars have noticed the trends, including proponents of the servant leadership theory. For example, Dirk van Dierendonck and Kathleen Patterson note that “views on what accounts for good leadership have changed dramatically” in the twenty-first century.

1520 Rost, 1993, 74.
1521 Rost, 1993, 99.
1523 Volckman, 2005, 3.
1524 Volckman, 2005, 3 (italics added).
1525 Volckman, 2005, 3 (italics added).
1526 Volckman, 2005, 3. Mark Hughes contends, related to the old ways of thinking about leadership, that he is “far more interested in working with people [because] it is through cooperation and collaboration that good things happen and we potentially begin to influence each other for mutual benefit, rather than for our own individualistic/selfish gains and desire for power over others” (2016, 359).
1527 Patterson & van Dierendonck, 2010, 3.
replaced by a view ... that gives priority to stewardship, ethical behaviour and collaboration” from the standpoint of a leader’s pursuit of moral virtue and their willingness to connect with others.¹⁵²⁸

For Rost, post-industrial era (or twenty-first century) leadership is defined as “an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes.”¹⁵²⁹ In contrast to the industrial paradigm, which emphasises “power and control, individual leaders doing leadership [including serving] and followers doing followership, and the view that the top-level decision-maker is the only person who does leadership”, a post-industrial approach is a “collaborative” effort that requires four essential elements to be present if a series of activities are to be labelled leadership at all.¹⁵³⁰ The first element of this new paradigm is noncoercive influence.¹⁵³¹ The second is people who are in a relationship together.¹⁵³² The third is the pursuit of real and significant changes for all who are part of the relationship — including for the world at large.¹⁵³³ Lastly, the fourth is the notion that the purposes and roles of all who are in the relationship are important, not only those of a single person.¹⁵³⁴ Each of these four standards together equates to collaborative leadership rather than a type of leadership that engenders “a great leader doing great things”.¹⁵³⁵ My aim in the next section is to demonstrate that the lifelong learning theory fits such a model of twenty-first-century leadership and provides an alternative to servant leadership in the church context.

**Lifelong Learning — Twenty-First Century Leadership**

As I showed in chapter four, the lifelong learning theory, in the field of education, shifts away from understanding learning as merely the passive reception of information (which ends when the lecture and lecturer conclude).¹⁵³⁶ Lifelong learning entails that a person participates in their learning to such an extent that they encounter new experiences and other perspectives, which might influence and “change” them.¹⁵³⁷ The old ways of thinking about education and learning relied upon the actions of one person (the teacher) to dispense information to a relatively passive group of students.¹⁵³⁸ This outdated approach to learning reflects similarly outdated concepts inherent to the

¹⁵²⁸ Patterson & van Dierendonck, 2010, 3.
¹⁵²⁹ Volckman, 2005, 4.
¹⁵³⁰ Volckman, 2005, 4.
¹⁵³¹ Rost, 1993, 102.
¹⁵³² Rost, 1993, 102.
¹⁵³³ Rost, 1993, 103.
¹⁵³⁴ Rost, 1993, 103.
¹⁵³⁵ Rost, 1993, 103.
¹⁵³⁶ Illeris, 2018, 90.
industrial-era leadership paradigm, wherein there is one “great man” who is capable of managing an organisation towards success and reaching its goals.\textsuperscript{1539}

The lifelong learning theory pushes against such notions, calling for participation, collaboration, and an openness to the type of relational influence that is “multi-directional” and not structured in a top-down manner (or even bottom-up).\textsuperscript{1540} Instead, influence takes place “in all directions” as those involved in the leadership relationship share equal right and equal opportunity to persuade one another (without coercion), which in turn means all members are free “to drop into or out of the relationship” as they choose, without fear.\textsuperscript{1541} As lifelong learners, followers on this model are always more than one person who are never passive in the relationship and who are not merely doing some sort of “followership” as past theories purport.\textsuperscript{1542} Rather, the lifelong learner, whether leading or following, views themselves like everyone else, as a person who is actively learning in a myriad of ways, which include as they influence and are themselves influenced by those around them in their context and learning community. On this model, when a follower is actively influencing others in the relationship - they could become a leader, which means that either there are now multiple leaders influencing or that a once-leader is now a new follower in the leadership relationship.\textsuperscript{1543}

Thus, the lifelong learner as a leader quite easily becomes a follower as they are influenced and gain new experiences and perspectives which challenge their old frames of reference or as they realise that others are better equipped to lead than they are. Furthermore, on a model of lifelong learning, a leader might influence others with new concepts, beliefs, and ideals to the extent that these followers (as lifelong learners themselves) change or let go of their long-held beliefs to adopt newer ones – and this process is typically transformative which I will explain further below. For this reason, lifelong learners as leaders and followers are not threatened by the knowledge, abilities and skills of others but rather see everyone as having something to offer or to learn as the community grows, adapts, and faces new and inevitable challenges in an ever-changing world.

Lifelong learning in the context of leadership, unlike servant leadership, removes the notion “that leadership must be effective to be leadership; that leadership must produce excellence, achievement, success, or results; [and] that leadership is good management.”\textsuperscript{1544} A “product” is not

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1539} Rost, 1993, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{1540} Rost, 1993, 91.
\item \textsuperscript{1541} Rost, 1993, 107.
\item \textsuperscript{1542} Rost, 1993, 112.
\item \textsuperscript{1543} Rost, 1993, 112.
\item \textsuperscript{1544} Rost, 1993, 118 (italics added).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the end-game of lifelong learning and the twenty-first-century leadership relationship that I am drawing out here.\textsuperscript{1545} This does not imply that leadership of the lifelong learning kind is incapable of accomplishing “real changes” for an individual or the world around them. On the contrary, as Jarvis states from the beginning, lifelong learning and change go “hand in glove”.\textsuperscript{1546} However, a lifelong learner, in a post-industrial leadership framework, is less concerned with their personal set of outcomes or some arbitrary notion of success, excellence or efficacy and rather looks for ways to creatively adapt and collaborate with others because “leadership is about transformation”.\textsuperscript{1547} In other words, “leadership, properly defined, is about transformation, all kinds of transformations” that initially take place within the scope of the influence relationship of leadership (itself) with inevitable rippling effects into the world external to it.\textsuperscript{1548}

The type of transformation that I am describing might be “physical, intellectual, aesthetic, psychological, social, civic, ecological, transcendental, moral, spiritual, and holistic”.\textsuperscript{1549} On a post-industrial paradigm of leadership and as a lifelong learner, “all of these transformations” in their various “shapes, sizes, qualities, and moral perspectives” count as transformation and are made possible.\textsuperscript{1550} On this account, transformation means that a lifelong learning leader is actively taking in new information and experiences to be openly evaluated against their current frames of reference, beliefs and worldviews to such an extent that they are able to either hold on to their frames of reference or trade them for alternative ones which might better serve them and their community in the future. Disruptions of this sort push the lifelong learner who is self-aware, open and adaptable to critique their beliefs and ideals, deciding whether these continue to be dependable or if they should be adjusted or let go altogether. Either way, this process is considered transformative for the lifelong learner and for those around them.

For this and other reasons, what lifelong learning helps to upend and redefine is what it means to fail for leaders, followers, and their communities. Unlike the old paradigms of leadership, failure for the lifelong learner can never be equated with a failure to attain all the desired changes and possible outcomes that were originally set or intended by those who are leading and following.\textsuperscript{1551} Instead, the virtuous nature of a lifelong learning type of leadership necessitates that failure is only ever to stop learning – to arrest the process of multi-directional influence and thus set oneself up as the “great leader” who alone will save the world. To take such a stance is anathema to

\textsuperscript{1545} Rost, 1993, 116.  
\textsuperscript{1546} London, 2012, 3.  
\textsuperscript{1547} Rost, 1993, 126.  
\textsuperscript{1548} Rost, 1993, 126.  
\textsuperscript{1549} Rost, 1993, 126.  
\textsuperscript{1550} Rost, 1993, 126.  
\textsuperscript{1551} Rost, 1993, 118.
lifelong learning and to Christian humility that is drawn from it because it means that a leader has stopped participating, stopped collaborating and influencing, and stopped evaluating themselves and their ideals – in essence halting the process of transformation. Thus, to fail in leadership on this account is to close oneself off from the ideas, worldviews and beliefs of others to the extent that the leader is rendered incapable of seeing and evaluating their own context which means that the leader is incapable of seeing ways to creatively adapt, adjust or collaborate with those within that context and the respective learning community. In this light, failure for the lifelong learning theory is akin to pride because it means a person has turned exclusively inward, refusing to look up to God or to the gift of other humans around them. Pride like this is an abdication and defamation of the leadership relationship and should be considered vicious because it typically only serves to maintain the status quo or worse, drive progress backwards.

In this regard, I point to Francis’s humble leadership as an example of lifelong learning because he was able to evaluate his ideals and strongly held beliefs within his context and then adjust or let go of them, as necessary to propel the order forwards into the future. Because Francis feared God and trusted Christ with the outcomes, he was enabled to persevere and to learn from all the confusing and challenging times in his life, which helped to unleash transformation for his community, the church and the world as the order continued in his absence. None of this was easy for Francis, which demonstrates that the pursuit of the virtuous moral life is, in fact, often riddled with setbacks, confusion and difficulties. Francis might be considered a failure on any industrial theory of leadership (including servant leadership) because he did not accomplish all the outcomes that he had envisioned from the start, i.e., about his ideal of poverty and the order.

However, as a lifelong learner, Francis was exemplary because he remained open, collaborative, adaptive and flexible, and did what he could to see that his order continued after his death. Rather than refusing to trust Christ or rejecting the help of others, Francis maintained his humility and eschewed pride, virtuously demonstrating resiliency and efficacy in the face of complex and trying circumstances – which included his own declining physical health. Francis remained constant in his pursuit of the virtuous life, accepting the place that God had marked out for him as the founder of the lesser brothers who had let go of his ideals for the sake of holding on to Christ and pushing the order securely into the future.

**Summary & Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have sought to provide an alternative way to think about leadership for today’s church, in terms of lifelong learning, which offsets and provides a replacement for the servant leadership theory. I started by introducing Greenleaf’s servant leadership theory in detail
from its inception to the many theoretical constructs that have come forth in the literature over the past fifty years. For example, I delineated several lists of traits, characteristics, and measures devised, across disciplines (i.e., from Spears and Laub), which provided the theoretical framing that the servant leadership theory needed since its origin as a mere “philosophy”. I then demonstrated how scholars, such as Patterson, attached moral virtues, like love and humility to the servant leadership theory, and subsequently how biblical scholars, theologians and Christian leadership experts adopted the theory as the proper and Christlike model for the modern church. I concluded that by the twenty-first century, servant leadership had become a repository for most any notion of leadership that a scholar could dream up, not to mention a leadership theory that was rarely critiqued in the literature.

I explained some of the critiques of servant leadership that have come forth over the past decades, including most recently in the field of education by Eaton. I showed that the servant leadership theory is problematic on several fronts – such as the outdated moniker of “servant”, its impracticality in diverse contexts and the underpinnings of gender and minority inequality. Such critiques were supported by recent empirical research, which discovered that servant leadership (at least in a limited context) does not deliver on its promises and only seems relevant in situations where white males of general equal status are in positions of leadership. I concluded from these critiques that the servant leadership theory as a prominent and ongoing model of humble Christian leadership in the church is outdated, problematic and impractical – setting up my theory that a satisfying alternative to servant leadership is leadership conceived in terms of lifelong learning.

From there, I examined a new paradigm in contemporary leadership literature called the “post-industrial era” school of leadership for the twenty-first century. I discussed how this theory differed from the outdated industrial era approach with its “peripheral” lists of traits, measures, and virtues replete in theories such as servant leadership. Then, I delineated the unique ways that the lifelong learning theory aligns with this new paradigm in that it prescribes that both leaders and followers in a dynamic relationship influence one another (non-coercively) through their openness, self-awareness, and a collaborative spirit to the extent that each is willing to adjust or let go of long-held beliefs and ideals for their own transformation and the good of the learning community and context in which they live.

Leadership defined in terms of lifelong learning means that everyone has something to learn, whether they see themselves as leaders or as followers. For example, there are those in minority or disempowered positions who need to learn to assert themselves or push back against their own feelings of inadequacy as valuable influencers. Likewise, others have been in positions of power and prestige who could learn better to listen to followers and perhaps grow in self-awareness.
regarding the power dynamics of their in-group as they look towards a future of collaboration and transformation. On an account like this, an organisation is not dependent on one main figure or a “great leader” – nor is it reliant upon set-goals and strategies for so-called success, which uses followers for this end. Rather, the lifelong learning theory portrays success as a willingness to remain open to new ideas and ways of doing things that might be complicated, perplexing, and personally difficult, but that ultimately might allow for radical change to an institution.

Lastly, I pointed back to Francis’s example of lifelong learning when he first contextualised his gospel message by taking up the practice of poverty in much the same way the Dominicans had done to draw back in the faithful to the church. In this regard, Francis also adjusted his views on theological education for the order because he understood that the times were changing, and training was needed to propel the ministry forward into an intellectual climate that he knew little about. As a lifelong learner in his own right, Francis was able to let go of his original ideal of poverty as he had envisioned it for the order he founded, while also holding tightly to it for himself as a way to influence and set an example for others before he died and into the future as the order continued on without him.

I argued that for reasons like these, Francis was humble, leading his order by faith in Christ during challenging and changing times. Rather than acting in pride by holding on to his personal ideals for the order and closing himself off to the input and influence of others, Francis looked up to God for reassurance and trusted others to do what he could not. At the time of his death, Francis had reached perhaps the pinnacle of his lifelong learning as he believed that Christ would show the order what to do without him. Considering all of this, humble Christian leadership, defined in terms of lifelong learning not only provides a good and acceptable alternative to the servant leadership theory for the twenty-first century church, but it also resolves controversies that have plagued Francis’s narrative and example of humility. Christian humility conceived this way, through concepts drawn from the lifelong learning theory, evades the modern critiques that reject it on the grounds that it is only self-abasing and thus, outdated, slavish and inimical to those who practise it in a modern society. Instead, on my account, Christian humility is a virtue, which when practised, promotes human flourishing.
Conclusion

In this thesis, I counteracted the modern critiques that Christian humility is self-abasing and self-deprecating to such an extent that it is considered outdated, slavish, contrary to human flourishing, and unnecessary for today’s world and in the church context. I provided an internal critique that takes seriously these external modern critiques, drawing upon historical precedent to assert that the notion of learning provides a useful starting point for reconceiving the moral virtue of humility. On this basis, I devised an account of Christian humility by using concepts from a contemporary theory in the field of education, called lifelong learning. The lifelong learner is open, self-aware, flexible, collaborates with respect to others, is creatively adaptive and willing to trade outdated beliefs and ideals in exchange for newer ones, all of which allow for personal and corporate transformation. I argued that Christian humility, when viewed from this perspective, is less vulnerable to the modern critiques.

To show how the lifelong learning theory works, I turned to the historiography of the medieval saint, Francis of Assisi. Francis is a well-known example of Christian humility. However, I delineated some of the ways in which Francis’s humility is controversial because he practised self-abasement and an ideal of poverty that make him vulnerable to the modern critiques. I intervened in these debates and showed, on contextual grounds, supported by contemporary Franciscan scholarship, and in terms of lifelong learning, that Francis was in fact, a good and life-affirming example of Christian humility in how he led his order before he died in 1226. Then, I explored the implications of the lifelong learning theory by applying it in the field of contemporary leadership studies. I analysed a popular model of leadership, which has been practised by businesses and in churches for decades, called servant leadership.

I asserted, with the support of contemporary leadership studies, that the servant leadership theory, which is most often associated with the virtue of humility, falls prey to the same types of modern critiques that plague Christian humility. I showed how servant leadership is outdated and aligns with industrial era models of leading, rather than post-industrial, twenty-first-century ways of leading. I argued that the lifelong learning theory provides an alternative to servant leadership, which resists the modern critiques and offers a practical, contemporary model of humble leadership. I concluded that Christian humility, when it is conceived in terms of the lifelong learning theory, not only helps to resolve some of the historical controversies related to Francis’s humble example, but it also gives today’s church a less problematic tool (i.e., in comparison to servant leadership) and an updated resource through which to measure and characterise humble leadership.
To carry out this research, I wrote eight chapters. I designated three chapters for developing a selected history of Christian humility, concluding with the ways that contemporary scholars have attempted to depict it today. In the middle chapter of the thesis, I elucidated the background and concepts which make up the lifelong learning theory. Then, I provided two chapters on Francis’s historiography, followed by the chapter wherein I linked Francis and his humility to the lifelong learning theory, before concluding the thesis with a chapter that explores the implications of lifelong learning for leadership in the modern church context.

In chapter one, I traced how humility developed in thought and practice throughout parts of pre-modernity. I started by discussing its prominence as a central moral virtue among the Hebrews of the Ancient Near East, exemplified in their writings through human examples, such as Moses and King Josiah, who looked up to Yahweh for help, guidance and reassurances as they led the Israelites during difficult times of transition. I examined Hebrew rabbinic tradition, found in the Talmud, which depicts the humble person as a constant learner in the world that God created for them. I underscored humility’s importance as a Christian virtue, portrayed in the influential writings of Augustine, such as his autobiographical Confessions. Then, I showed how the early monastics of the fifth and sixth centuries expressed Christian humility by living in isolation in deserts and practising extreme forms of self-abasement, humiliations, nakedness and unquestioned obedience to authority. I delineated how these practices were codified into the rules of the monastic orders, such as those of the Benedictines and the Cistercians. Then, I pointed to Aquinas’s perception of Christian humility as a counterexample to these monastic practices, concluding that Thomas provided an internal critique, maintained religious tradition that a humble person is dependent on God and the inner working of grace and that self-abasement or obedience to authority does not automatically reflect humility but might be false humility.

In chapter two, I assessed Christian humility as it was perceived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I examined the arguments of three influential modern philosophers, who protested against the virtuous nature of a self-abasing type of Christian humility. David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Nietzsche critiqued Christian humility, calling it monkish, contrary to inherent human dignity, and slavish, ultimately rejecting it as a virtue and viewing it as a danger to modern society. I underscored that these external arguments, what I referred to as “the modern critiques”, had a significant impact on Christian humility’s reputation as a necessary moral virtue, casting doubt on whether it is good or necessary for today’s world.

In chapter three, I examined two ways that contemporary scholars approach Christian humility in relation to the modern critiques. In the first approach, I contended that scholars revert to
the old theories of Christian humility as they had been understood and practised by the monastics in pre-modernity. I argued that these researchers were less concerned about the validity of the modern critiques, and more concerned that the critiques had all but erased Christian humility from the contemporary study of Christian theology and discipleship. In the second approach, I showed how scholars were sympathetic to the modern critiques, hoping to provide accounts that were less vulnerable to them, while at the same time remaining faithful to Christian tradition and theology. I pointed out that it was to this second approach that I was contributing with this thesis by giving an internal critique of Christian humility which upholds religious tradition while also taking seriously the external modern critiques. I surveyed and analysed examples from each of these approaches, before highlighting historical precedent for linking humility with learning as an introduction to my theory about lifelong learning. I asserted that Christian humility, when conceived in this way, is not self-abasing, promotes human flourishing, and is less vulnerable to the modern critiques.

In chapter four, I provided the background and necessary concepts for understanding the lifelong learning theory from contemporary literature in the field of education. I showed that a lifelong learner is characterised by self-awareness, openness, flexibility, creative adaptability, and a willingness to collaborate with others for individual and corporate transformation. I asserted that concepts like these provide an innovative framework from which to conceive an alternative model of Christian humility. To show how the theory of lifelong learning works, I examined Francis of Assisi’s controversial historiography in relation to his example of Christian humility.

Chapters five and six focused on introducing Francis and recounting his biography, starting with his historical context of the high Middle Ages (900-1300). I highlighted relevant changes that took place in western Europe, such as economic and social mobility among the peasant class, the growth of cities, the rise of the merchant class and the emerging university system, starting in Paris. I pointed out how these shifts were reflected in the religious life of the period through increased materialism and people’s growing disenchantment and distrust of the local clergy and the papacy. I discussed attempts by Pope Innocent III to enact needed church reforms in his day through the rulings of the Lateran IV Council in 1215. I explained some of these rulings, such as canon 13, which required all new religious orders to adopt or write an approved rule. Then, I recounted Francis’s story as it is told by Thomas of Celano in the Vita Prima (1229). I referred to secondary scholarship where needed to fill in Francis’s timeline up to his canonisation in 1228.

In chapter seven, I linked Francis and the lifelong learning theory to show another way to view some of the controversies and barriers related to his example of humility. I started by addressing Francis’s self-abasing behaviours, asserting that Francis adapted his lifestyle, similar to
that of other religious groups and movements, including the Dominicans in his time, as a way to follow the example of Christ’s humility via his incarnation by embracing poverty to effectively, if not strategically, draw others to hear the gospel message. I showed that Francis’s personal behaviours allowed him to safeguard his ideal of poverty to honour the commitment he had made to Christ in the early days of his conversion and to set an example that inspired and motivated others. I argued that Francis did not mandate, nor did he impose such extreme practices on others within the order, but only himself, because he had a keen self-understanding when it came to his own penchant for vanity and the praise of others. I discussed Francis’s reluctant - but certain - acceptance of learning and theological education for some within the order in light of his collaboration with and trust in Anthony of Padua. From there, I argued for a different interpretation than the traditionally held one concerning Francis’s controversial episodes in his later years surrounding the writing of the Rules and in relation to his motivations behind writing his Testament. I demonstrated, based on current Franciscan research, and then in terms of the lifelong learning theory, that Francis, by grace, was able to let go of the original ideal of poverty that he had envisioned for the order in the early years.

For this reason, the order was officially able to continue on with Francis’s blessing before he died. I concluded that by reconsidering Francis’s problematic humility through the interpretative lens of the lifelong learning theory, he stands out as a good example in how he led his order.

In chapter eight, I explored the implications of Christian humility that is conceived in terms of the lifelong learning theory by analysing a popular model of leadership, called “servant leadership”. I provided the background on how servant leadership developed from a simple concept that was put forth by businessman Robert Greenleaf in 1970, to become a strategy for effective leadership across disciplines over the last five decades. I examined the various ways in contemporary leadership studies that scholars have expanded Greenleaf’s concepts of servant leadership by assigning it characteristics, traits, empirical measures and virtues, such as humility, love and altruism. Then, I explained that biblical scholars and theologians Christianised servant leadership by connecting it to Christ’s example as a humble servant of God. I contended that servant leadership has become a dominant way to think about and assess humble church leadership. However, I underscored the fact that the servant leadership theory has received only a modicum of critique since its inception in the 1970s. In this regard, using recent research, I discussed how some scholars have argued that the servant leadership theory is problematic when it is applied to issues of gender and inequality, which makes it outdated with the potential of causing harm when it is misused or misunderstood. I concluded my analysis of servant leadership by arguing that lifelong learning provides an alternative model of humble leadership for the modern church context, which is practical, necessary and updated for use in today’s world as a pathway to human flourishing.
Thus, I have shown that Christian humility has historically been critiqued as self-abasing and not life-affirming. To these lingering critiques, I have contended from the start that Christian humility can be alternatively defined in terms of lifelong learning. I suggested such a theory on the basis of some historical precedent found in sources from pre-modernity such as, the *Talmud* and the writings of Aquinas, which link humility to the concept of learning. I argued that Christian humility viewed through the lens of the lifelong learning theory provides relief to the modern concerns because to be a lifelong learner is not self-abasing and promotes human flourishing. From there, I introduced Francis of Assisi because in similar manner to the critiques against Christian humility, his practices of radical poverty might be viewed as solely self-abasing and not life-affirming. However, I demonstrated using contemporary Franciscan scholarship and on contextual grounds that there is an alternative way to interpret Francis’s humility which is through concepts drawn from lifelong learning and traits of a lifelong learner. As a lifelong learner in his own right, Francis’s humility as he led his order is not self-abasing but life-affirming. The implications of Christian humility understood in this way are that it provides a useful and practical model of leadership for the modern church context and an alternative to the popular but inherently problematic servant leadership theory. For these reasons, I conclude that Christian humility conceived in terms of lifelong learning is a necessary moral virtue that is vital for today’s world because it promotes human flourishing for everyone.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


**Secondary Sources**


217


“Intellectual Humility and the Ends of the Virtues: Conflicting Aretaic Desiderata.” Political


Horsman, John Henry. *Servant-Leaders in Training: Foundations of the Philosophy of Servant-


224


Moorman, John R. H. *The Sources for the Life of St Francis of Assisi*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1940.


Appendix: Nonreligious Models of Humility in Contemporary Thought

Introduction

I discussed in chapter three of this thesis that there are two approaches used to model *Christian* humility in contemporary literature. However, there is a third approach whereby scholars are seeking to rehabilitate the moral virtue of humility for use in today’s world. I refer to these models as nonreligious accounts of humility because scholars who use this approach do not start with, nor do they typically use, any religious tradition or notion of the transcendent to derive their theories. In this Appendix, I explore some of these controversial models and the perplexing ways that this approach has become popularised in contemporary research on humility. I demonstrate that, while some of these theories are interesting and innovative, they are confusing, remain vulnerable to the modern critiques, and provide no clearer way to understand and practise humility in today’s world.

Humility as Corrective to Self-Other Comparisons

For more than forty years, scholars like English philosopher, Philippa Foot have catalogued humility as a “corrective virtue”, asserting that humility is necessary because of “the self-other comparison” whereby humans either “tend to think too well of themselves” or in other instances, not well enough.\(^{1552}\) Thus, humility is a way to correct misjudged human comparisons. In Foot’s benchmark research, she writes that “virtues and vices ... depend on what human nature is like...”.\(^{1553}\) For Foot, humans vacillate between at least two dispositions. The first is towards things such as “idleness” or “despair” which then necessitates the “correctives” such as dispositions of “industriousness” or “hope”. These latter qualities are what Foot calls the corrective sorts of virtues, which include humility. Corrective virtues like humility, argues Foot, help humans do “what is difficult for [them]”.\(^{1554}\) In this regard, for improperly thinking about others, i.e., misjudging humans


\(^{1553}\) Foot, 1978, 9-10.

\(^{1554}\) Foot, 1978, 10.
and their abilities over against our own, humility provides the right reorienting and correcting that a
moral person needs.

Foot’s research is significant, albeit highly debated, because her corrective virtues concept
and humility, most acutely, cast light on human nature, highlighting its weakness and need for
correction in the first place. Moreover, contemporary scholars contest what precisely the corrective
should look like related to humility and the humble person.¹⁵⁵⁵ For example, when (not if) a person
misjudges the opinions of another, how or what precisely corrects these misjudgments to the extent
that the corrections are undeniably humble? The answer to this and questions like it are contested
among scholars today, particularly philosophers and psychologists who attempt to conceive of
humility as a corrective or as a reorienting virtue to the imbalanced and erroneous self-other
comparisons that happen in the realm of human behaviour—or “what humans are like”.¹⁵⁵⁶ The
combinations and renderings of these sorts of models are replete in the literature. I provide a
sampling of them here.

Philosophers such as Jorge Garcia and James Kellenberger help to make sense of and
organise some of the corrective theories of humility by putting forth “general” features that seem to
surface and resurface in contemporary research.¹⁵⁵⁷ Each of these features is conceived from a
particular way that humility addresses the corrective in self-other comparisons, and include: 1) a low
self-opinion, 2) a low estimation of personal merit, 3) a modest opinion of personal rank or status, 4)
a lack of self-assertion, 5) a refusal to claim what is due, and 6) a self-awareness related to personal
defects.¹⁵⁵⁸ Although this might seem to oversimplify the data – the taxonomy proves useful. For

¹⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Grenberg, 2005, 193. Grenberg builds her theory of humility using Kantian Moral Philosophy, but also
starts from this notion of the corrective virtue and how the humble person appropriately compares
to others.
¹⁵⁵⁶ Foot, 1978, 10.
Garcia in “Being Unimpressed with Ourselves: Reconceiving Humility,” Philosophia 34.4 (2006): 417–435, 426-
427.
example, on Garcia’s corrective model of humility, the humble person knows their defects to such an extent that any of their enviable qualities are incapable of exaggerating their image because they know all too well their “limitations and flaws”\textsuperscript{1559}. Thus, Garcia’s humility corrects a person from thinking too highly of themselves because the humble person knows their flaws. In this way, Garcia’s humility is subsumed almost entirely under feature #6 (self-awareness of defects). Other general models of humility might be logged and explained this same way.

Norvin Richards’s corrective seems to fit well with features #4 (lack of self-assertion) and #6 (self-awareness of defects) but would be qualified to include “forgiveness” which Richards argues is paramount to the discovery of defects both personally and in others.\textsuperscript{1560} For Richards, the degree of correction that his account of humility calls for is regulated by the humble person’s willingness to forgive both themselves and others. Richards concludes that humility is “a positively good thing” if it has “an inclination to forgive, good judgment of others, and reasonable expectations of oneself”\textsuperscript{1561}. Owen Flanagan’s humility account might include features #4 (lack of self-assertion), and / or #5 (a refusal to claim what is due), while J.R. Buri’s insistence that humility is not “people trying to believe [that] they are fools” but rather a sort of “self-forgetfulness” might be catalogued under feature #4 (lack of self-assertion).\textsuperscript{1562} Humility as self-forgetfulness corrects a person’s tendency to, in a sense, over-remember themselves which can cause improper judgments in the face of others.

In more recent research, Robert Roberts and Jay Wood’s humility model arguably aligns with features #1 (correcting to a lower self-opinion), #3 (a modest opinion of rank) coupled with #5 (self-

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1559} Garcia, 2006, 427.
\textsuperscript{1561} Richards, 1988, 258-259.
\end{flushleft}
The examples of humility argued in these ways as a moral corrective to the self-other comparison remain at the centre of ongoing research and debate in the literature. My point here has been to show that the above six features, by and large, represent many of the traits attributable to these types of corrective theories of humility found in contemporary literature. However, in recent research, empirical psychologists have experimented with these corrective models to test them against the reality of human behaviour, which I take up in the next section.

**The Self-Corrective in Empirical Research**

Empirical psychologists set out to determine if humility is a valid and useful human trait for contemporary society. To this end, scientists began by depicting humility using the corrective/self-other comparison model such as a “low self-focus” coupled with a “high other-focus” which also included related or associated scales, such as forgiveness and patience. The experiments were predominantly self-reporting. The results showed that the same respondents who said that they valued humility as it was defined and given to them for the experiment (i.e., as low self versus high other focus), often-times struggled to rightly assess themselves or others during experimentation.

These results stayed relatively the same for both religious and non-religious participants. The data also remained consistent after respondents filled in workbooks on humility, implying that these exercises had little to no effect on how a person would compare themselves or others during experimentation.

---


1564 Don E. Davis and Joshua N. Hook, “Humility, Religion, and Spirituality: An Endpiece,” The Journal of Psychology and Theology, 42.1 (2014): 111-117. While these studies are seeking to understand humility as it relates to religion and spirituality, the humility theories that they draw from to build their tests and measures are foundationally nonreligious from the start.


1566 Wright et al, 2017, 8.

1567 Wright et al, 2017, 8.

1568 Wright et al, 2017, 8.
the experiment relative to the corrective of humility. With these data, scientists have attempted to piece together various ways to motivate and induce stronger results related to humility responses. In other words, researchers want to know how it is that a person becomes humble or improves their judgments in the self-other comparison. The outcomes of these experiments point to the difficulty of practising the corrective virtue of humility in the reality of human experience. They might also mean that the theory of humility itself is foundationally flawed. The number of studies of this sort in recent years is striking and yet, inconclusive.

**Humility as Modesty**

Conceiving humility as some form of modesty has more than flooded and dominated much of the literature since at least the late 1980s. Philosopher Julia Driver’s contemporary research is considered a benchmark as she decisively construes modesty in relation to humility perhaps hoping to provide needed relief or clarity in the ongoing debate related to viewing humility as a corrective virtue. For Driver, modesty is “a virtue of ignorance” by which she means that the modest person unknowingly “underestimates” themselves. Ignorance on Driver’s theory has little to do with intelligence and more to do with a person’s lack of knowledge about others external to themselves. A modest person does not underestimate or misjudge another person (i.e., their skills) based on a one-to-one comparison with their own abilities. On the contrary, for Driver a modest person will underestimate their skills with limited to no data in comparing how they measure up to another person in reality.

Thus, Driver differentiates her virtue of modesty from the virtue of humility, asserting that a humble person—unlike a modest person—can paint an accurate, though perhaps unflattering picture

---

1569 Wright et al, 2017, 8.
1570 Wright et al, 2017, 10.
1571 Wright et al, 2017, 4-6.
of themselves because they have assessed themselves and compared the data relative to other persons and come up short.\textsuperscript{1575} But the modest person will underestimate themselves whether it is an accurate reflection or not because they are not comparing themselves to another person at all, nor do they have the data or desire to do so.\textsuperscript{1576} In this way, Driver’s modesty of ignorance, in one sense, seems to escape or to sidestep the issue of the corrective and the accompanying conundrum of the self-other comparison. However, to say that Driver’s theory of ignorant modesty versus humility spawned critique is to understate it. The amount of literature on modesty is dizzying. There are at least two major strands of thought on Driver’s work. First, on the one hand, scholars want to treat modesty and humility as “interchangeable” – as the same sort of phenomenon in human experience.\textsuperscript{1577} On the other hand, researchers wish to keep humility and modesty separate but perhaps correlated depending on the theory, and yet not necessarily compatible with Driver’s theory at all. Debates continue today. To give some idea of these lines of research, I provide a representative example for each.

**Interchangeable – Humility or Modesty**

First, Raterman’s critique, like others, objects to Driver’s use of “ignorance” related to virtue at all. He wonders how ignorance could ever be considered virtuous on any account, full stop. Instead, Raterman argues for “reluctance—underpinned by the right normative reasons—to evaluate oneself in terms of one’s goodness” relative to others.\textsuperscript{1578} Raterman’s point is that “the appropriate attitude [of modesty] is better described as a general reluctance by which he means that “the modest person is reluctant to evaluate [themselves] in terms of [their] goodness … [but] takes the fact that [they are] so good to be, in many settings, and for the appropriate reasons, bad to harp on or flaunt.”\textsuperscript{1579} In this way, Raterman argues that his reluctant modesty equated with humility holds

\begin{flushright}
1578 Raterman, 2006, 228.  
1579 Raterman, 2006, 228.
\end{flushright}
itself back from *flaunting* in front of or to others, reflecting a better sort of humility in contrast to Driver’s ignorant modesty.

**Distinctive – Humility and Modesty**

I highlight G. Alex Sinha’s account which he contends “modernizes” the virtue of humility. Not unlike other models, Sinha critiques Driver’s ignorant underestimation but also includes a critique of the work of Ethicist, George Schueler who theorises that humility is to know one’s accomplishments outright but to show little to no concern as to “whether [others] evaluate [the person] highly *because* of these accomplishments” or not. Sinha’s project is to conceive of humility foundationally from the work of modern English Philosopher and Theologian, Hastings Rashdall (1858-1924) who was an “ideal utilitarian”, calling humility the “other-regarding virtue – specifically, one that indicates our love for our neighbours.” Rashdall’s humility called for a resistance to “the habitual dwelling with satisfaction upon [one’s] merits” because, he argued, the humble person is “too much about others” to dwell on their own perceptive superiority.

Sinha keeps Rashdall’s “love of neighbour” notion with the necessity and ability to do so both in public, through the right actions but also in private, in how a person thinks about and knows themselves, epistemically. Sinha concludes with his so-called “intuitive” model, delineating modesty as the private virtue and humility as the public one. In other words, humility and modesty are distinct yet interdependent virtues for the moral life. In private, a person might rightly and aptly know their skills and accomplishments without the “implausible assumption” that they are ignorant about them. But in public, the humble person seeks first and foremost to care about others ahead of themselves. In this way, Sinha differentiates modesty as the virtue directed towards the *self* (in

---


1581 Sinha, 2012, 266.

1582 Sinha, 2012, 266 (italics added).

private) and humility as the virtue directed towards the other (in public).\(^{1584}\) Debate continues as scholars like Driver, Raterman and Sinha seek to establish the proper link between modesty and humility, or to dissolve their associations altogether.

In the next section, I explore some unique theories of humility in contemporary literature. These, like the ones previously discussed, are detached from religious tradition or the transcendent, and some notably so. However, scholars in these accounts leave behind the perplexing notions of the corrective / self-other comparison and the debates surrounding, for example, what it means to be modest in the context of humility. Without these constraints, these scholars draw from a range of disciplines, including political theory, moral philosophy, literature and art as they attempt to rehabilitate and reconceive humility for modern times.

**Humility Derived using Political Theory**

In the realm of politics, Mark Button conceives humility as *useful* for “an active ethical and civic orientation”.\(^{1585}\) Button draws two clear lines in the sand related to Christian humility as he redefines it for a civil society. He asks, “can the moral vocabulary and practice of humility be redescribed in such a way as to shift it from its stature as a theistic moral command or a secular ‘corrective virtue’?”\(^{1586}\) Button’s rhetorical question is telling, implying that yes, he can and will reconstruct humility – moving it past theistic commands and notions of a corrective virtue. To be clear, Button means by “theistic moral command” *that* form of humility derived from Jewish and Christian traditions as “an essential spiritual quality that prepares the righteous believer to stand in

\(^{1586}\) Button, 2005, 861 (italics added).
an appropriate relationship of awe, obedience, and worship to creator God”.\(^{1587}\) Button attempts to construe a “secular” corrective virtue model, called “democratic humility”.\(^{1588}\)

To prove his theory, Button asserts that contemporary society, especially a civic and ethical one necessitates a “generalizable” virtue of humility, whereby the humble person has “no illusion of moral completeness [on their own] ... or any express will to mastery or domination”.\(^{1589}\) Button claims that his democratic humility is paramount for “fluid and rapidly changing late-modern societies”. Button argues that democratic humility, as he conceives it, is necessary because of the intrinsic communal danger of forming “fixed” ideals rather than fostering open and inclusive ones. Button gives no examples of what he means by these, however. Further, Button asserts that often in modern culture, “acceptable differences” can all at once become intolerable differences, causing “uncivil” dissension, which mandates humility.\(^{1590}\) Thus, his democratic theory of humility turns on the notion that a humble person sees themselves as incomplete but made whole through the civility of a democratic society – leading to ethical unity.

**Humility Derived using Neo-Kantian Philosophy**

Like Button, Jeanine Grenberg, in keeping with Kant, does not need the transcendent. Aligned with Button she hopes to cast off or lessen the impact of the self-other comparison on the humility theory that she devises. Grenberg asserts that any humility grounded in a self-other comparison will vacillate between “two unacceptable options”—inferiority and superiority.\(^{1591}\) Thus, Grenberg’s humble person rises above “comparative-competitive judgments”, taking on a “meta-attitude” which means that they see themselves as “dependent and corrupt agent[s] in the unavoidable pursuit of self-love” accompanied by “moral principles to which all persons” are called

\(^{1587}\) Button, 2005, 842.
\(^{1588}\) Button, 2005, 861.
\(^{1589}\) Button, 2005, 861.
\(^{1590}\) Button, 2005, 861.
\(^{1591}\) Grenberg, 2005, 133.
equally. For Grenberg, moral humans ought to grow in self-awareness and mutual respect for others since they know that all humans have “shared limits”. Grenberg writes that the humble “agent recognizes [their own] excellences, but recognizes also ... the equal moral status of all persons (their equal dignity and shared limits) ...”, which takes priority over the humble person’s own excellences.

Thus, for Grenberg the humble person can make no “claims of superiority – or inferiority – in relation to others” or at least this would be “rare ... even when true”. But all of this, argues Grenberg “is the case not because [the humble person] questions whether [they are] excellent, or superior, or inferior, but because the truth of those claims is contextualized by a larger value: an affirmation of the equal dignity and shared limits of all persons”. For the “rare” moments when a humble person mis-compares themselves to others, Grenberg has a solution, “moral exemplars” or human examples of virtue which I will take up in more detail directly below because their use is quite replete in the literature. In summary, Grenberg’s humility calls for a “balanced” disposition of equality due to shared human limitations with a growing self-awareness.

Grenberg admits that while self-other comparisons should be less common for the humble person who understands themselves and the equality and dignity of all persons with human limitations, comparisons unfortunately still happen. In cases when the humble person inevitably compares themselves, this should not be to ascertain inferiority or superiority but rather as a way for a “finite, rational agent” to discern another person’s exemplarism through which the humble person might make progress in personal “moral development”. In this regard, Louden argues that there are four different scenarios which, for Kant, warrant moral exemplarism: 1) for moral education as children watch particular and needed human examples from which they might build

1592 Grenberg, 2005, 133.
1593 Grenberg, 2005, 194.
1594 Grenberg, 2005, 194.
1595 Grenberg, 2005, 194 (italics added).
1596 Grenberg, 2005, 212.
their own “maxims” for living out moral adult lives, 2) for a direct human referent to the Moral Law because, at times “the finite mind needs images” or a real person to help fill in exactly what a principle means in the practicality of everyday life, 3) for inspiration which pushes human endeavour beyond itself since otherwise, humans are “happy to excuse themselves” claiming that the status quo is enough, and 4) for an ideal to admire and emulate – “not for copying” per se, but as a means for a person to try a new method for their personal, moral development.1598

What Louden delineates is not unlike Zagzebski’s most recent work in exemplarism, modelled after the concept of “Direct Reference” as conceived by Hilary Putnam (1975) and Saul Kripke (1980) in the semantics of natural kind terms.1599 Zagzebski’s aim is a theory that allows for practical moral development through the “telling and re-telling of stories and narratives” and in the “emulation of models” or human examples.1600 Similar to Louden, Zagzebski argues the limits of human rationality when it comes to defining a particular virtue outright because, oftentimes, these accounts can be one-dimensional or conceptually flat and superficial.1601 However, asserts Zagzebski, humans typically know a virtuous person when they see one.1602 Thus, Zagzebski puts forth in her model a demand for human observation through which virtues of all sorts, including humility, might conceptually broaden, deepen and be instantiated as these are directly attributable to human examples. Zagzebski’s list of potential exemplars and their narratives to observe is expansive but includes most any of the Christian saints, Nobel Peace Prize winners, and in particular, she notes the Trappist monks of Tibhirine, who in the mid-1990s refused to abandon their ministry amidst great danger in war-torn Algeria.1603

1603 Zagzebski, 2017, 36.
Humility Derived using Literature & Art

In light of the concept of exemplarism found in the methodology of contemporary humility research, I provide two examples that each incorporate moral exemplarism by looking at the lives of fictional characters. First is Tony Milligan’s reflections on humility wherein he uses the work of contemporary novelist and philosopher, Iris Murdoch (1919-1999). Second, in Shawn Tucker’s more recent monograph on humility and pride, he observes a vast array of characters found in literature and in works of art, from which he then builds a model of both humility and pride.¹⁶⁰⁴ Milligan affirms that a “Murdochian humility” favours moral progress which includes the use of moral exemplars.¹⁶⁰⁵ However, the scope of what Murdoch means by moral progress is not entirely clear, admits Milligan.

Milligan is quick to confess that there is little way for his conclusions about humility to be classified as “strictly Murdochian” because, for one, Murdoch was heavily influenced by the writings of philosopher and political activist, Simone Weil (1909-1943).\footnote{Milligan, 2007, 217.} For Weil, humility starts with a notion that humans are “nothing to begin with”.\footnote{Cf. Simone Weil’s Waiting for God, trans. Emma Crawford (New York: Harper Collins, 2001).} Although Murdoch might express “nothing” a bit differently than Weil, such as, “[t]here is nothing that cannot be broken or taken away from us”, Milligan concedes that Murdoch’s humility tends to be replete with “Weilian formulations” which are immediately problematic for the type of humility he wishes to model.\footnote{Milligan, 2007, 219.} Furthermore, Milligan wonders how moral progress is possible at all when connected to Weilian concepts like “self-blindness (a view once suggested by Luther)”, including Driver’s “virtue of ignorance”.\footnote{Milligan, 2007, 219.}

In these ways, Milligan’s work stands as a critique of these models. Still, Milligan hopes for a portrayal of humility that is “in the more limited sense”, Murdochian.\footnote{Milligan, 2007, 219.} For Milligan, humility will not include any past notions of the self-other comparison nor its correctives (i.e., no self-abnegation).\footnote{Milligan, 2007, 217.} Moreover, Milligan positively acknowledges the noble pride of personal “recognition” - in the spirit of Hume and Kant.\footnote{Milligan, 2007, 219-220.} Lastly, nowhere on Milligan’s account is there a need for religious tradition or the Transcendent. What Milligan sets out to do is analyse, in some detail, Murdoch’s well-known fictional characters, Michael Meade and James Tayper Pace from her award-winning novel, The Bell (1958).\footnote{Cf. Iris Murdoch, The Bell (London: Penguin, 1958).} What appears to be original about Milligan’s work is that most—if not all—of the characters he analyses seem, on the surface, like poor exemplars for moral living in general, and much less for humility in particular. For example, Michael Meade, a former schoolmaster in his late thirties is sexually attracted to an eighteen-year-old boy named Toby Gashe,
and while intoxicated kisses Toby, but then asks him to keep it a secret.\textsuperscript{1614} The characters are complicated, desperate at times, and grim, such as Nick Fawley who commits suicide at the end of \textit{The Bell}.\textsuperscript{1615}

Milligan argues for a complex and nuanced way to think about humility which seems fitting given the characters in much of Murdoch’s work. As previously stated, Milligan rejects any notion of self-abnegation—stepping away from self-other comparisons.\textsuperscript{1616} Instead, from Murdoch’s fictional characters, Milligan explains that what makes a person humble is their ability, within the context of their unique “situations” to rise to their “highest moral competences” (or aptitudes) \textit{but no further}.\textsuperscript{1617} What Milligan means by “moral competences” he takes from Aristotle as the disposition in a virtuous person to do what is right, not only universally but in the “particularity” of situations which they alone might face in life.\textsuperscript{1618} In this regard, the person who knows their limits—the boundaries which cap their moral competencies—this is their humility.\textsuperscript{1619} In other words, the humble person on Milligan’s “limited” Murdochian model would not look the same person-to-person. Rather, each humble person, with their own level of moral competency assesses the particular situation that they are in at any given moment, seeking to rise up to the height of their moral capacity as often as they might. Thus, a Murdochian approach to humility on this account, writes Milligan, “requires ordinary imperfect agents to act at, or close to, \textit{... and not beyond}” their abilities which renders them “a touchstone (or standard) for the moral life”.\textsuperscript{1620}

Tucker’s large monograph plumbs the depths of various literary characters, some well-

\textsuperscript{1614} Murdoch, 1958, 270ff.
\textsuperscript{1615} Murdoch, 1958, 300.
\textsuperscript{1616} Milligan, 2007, 217.
\textsuperscript{1617} Milligan, 2007, 224.
\textsuperscript{1618} Milligan, 2007, 222.
\textsuperscript{1619} Milligan, 2007, 223.
\textsuperscript{1620} Milligan, 2007, 227. See also, Tucker, 2016, 6.
known and others not, including works of art. Tucker’s intricate and nuanced reflections start with a painting by the American painter, Paul Cadmus (1904-1999) who depicted “the Seven Deadly Sins” in a series from 1943 until 1949 with Pride the first one out.\textsuperscript{1621} From this and works like it, Tucker describes pride as “pathological” and “ugly”—as iron-fisted control, self-satisfaction and disdain for others which creates smallness and human emptiness.\textsuperscript{1622} Tucker starts with the story of Griselda, first published by Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) in the Decameron (circa 1353).\textsuperscript{1623} The story goes that a maniacal Marquis of Sanluzzo marries a peasant, Griselda and then subjects her to horrific trials to test her loyalty and obedience to him. The Marquis’s first trial was to take their newborn daughter away from Griselda. Each test was more humiliating and more cruel than the one before it. In the end, Griselda’s humility is rewarded, and her children were all returned to her, safe and sound. Tucker remarks quite ironically that humility exemplified in the story, by Griselda, is “pathological” and “ugly”, like pride seen in the face of Cadmus’s painting above.\textsuperscript{1624} What Tucker means is that the sort of humility that is servile, subjected, only dutiful and weak—unwilling to stand up for those things and people that are good and valuable in this life—this is not humility but its antithesis. Tucker anchors much of his book with these opening illustrations from Cadmus’s Pride and Griselda’s humility.

Tucker ends his project by unpacking and analysing in great depth the transformations of Priam, the King of Troy and Achilles in Homer’s Iliad, and the characters, Albert and Celie in Alice Walker’s renowned book, The Color Purple (1982).\textsuperscript{1625} Tucker’s analysis is detailed, which includes his retelling of both narratives and I cannot take space here to expound them. But I will offer a partial summary of his conclusions on depicting humility. For Tucker, humility exemplified in Priam is a disposition of “deep devotion” and loyalty to those things and people that should be of highest

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1621} Tucker, 2016, 3ff. \\
\textsuperscript{1622} Tucker, 2016, 3-4. \\
\textsuperscript{1623} For Tucker’s summary of the story, cf. 5ff. \\
\textsuperscript{1624} Tucker, 2016, 7. \\
\textsuperscript{1625} Tucker, 2016, 171ff. 
\end{flushright}
importance and value, such as seasoned traditions, family and children, and a flourishing community that will progress into the future.\textsuperscript{1626} Moreover, the humble person, for Tucker, will risk themselves and their reputations—whatever it takes—to protect, care for and hold on to these valuable things and people.\textsuperscript{1627} As a result of such a disposition and accompanying actions, the humble person manifests an ongoing sense of self-worth and noble pride in themselves and in those they love.\textsuperscript{1628}

Such humility, with its noble pride, is typically transformative for those closest to it.\textsuperscript{1629} For example, Tucker argues that Priam shows this type of humility when he requested the body of Hector, his dead son, back from Achilles who had killed Hector by spearing him in the neck.\textsuperscript{1630} Tucker asserts that Priam’s humility in making this request unlocks for Achilles a sort of humility (away from his pride of vanity and self-glory), as Achilles now sees Priam in a new light.\textsuperscript{1631} Tucker brings Celie and Albert into the discussion, arguing against the folk-narrative about Griselda and the Marquis at the start, that Celie exemplified authentic humility, which was a far cry from Griselda’s pathological and ugly humility. In the story, Celie finally stands up for herself and the sake of her children, against the pride of her husband Albert who, for years, mocked and inhumanely and viciously abused her.\textsuperscript{1632} As Celie takes on the risk of ending her servility, fear, and weakness related to Albert’s cruelty, she exemplifies, for Tucker, the true nature of a humble person.\textsuperscript{1633} As such, Albert (unlike the Marquis) begins to see life in a new light, becoming humble himself as the narrative ends, revealing his love for Celie and vice versa.\textsuperscript{1634}

\textsuperscript{1626} Tucker, 2016, 188.  
\textsuperscript{1627} Tucker, 2016, 188.  
\textsuperscript{1628} Tucker, 2016, 191.  
\textsuperscript{1629} Tucker, 2016, 191.  
\textsuperscript{1630} Tucker, 2016, 172.  
\textsuperscript{1631} Tucker, 2016, 172.  
\textsuperscript{1632} Tucker, 2016, 204.  
\textsuperscript{1633} Tucker, 2016, 204-205.  
\textsuperscript{1634} Tucker, 2016, 205-206.
Conclusion

In this Appendix, I have examined samples of nonreligious theories of humility found in contemporary literature. Rather than emerging from religious tradition, these models emanate from other foundations, such as Foot’s philosophical concept of the corrective virtue and the self-other comparison present in human-to-human moral interactions. In this regard, I elucidated the ongoing debates and complexities related to adequately depicting humility using this methodology, including the perplexing and inconclusive results that have come forth in recent empirical research. Then, I showed how scholars, such as Driver and Raterman, began studying humility in relation to the notion of human modesty. I underscored the controversies and confusion inherent in this type of research. Lastly, I discussed accounts of humility delineated by scholars, such as Button, Grenberg and Tucker, who use as an interpretative lens, modern political theory, moral philosophy, literature and art. Some of the theories that I have sampled in this Appendix, particularly those that start from the perspective of humility as a corrective virtue in self-other comparisons, have become a mainstream or popular way that humility is thought of and discussed in today’s world, which includes in the field of theology and biblical studies. However, I conclude that, while some of the renderings here are innovative, by detaching the moral virtue of humility from its religious tradition and historical roots, scholars have not provided a theory less vulnerable to the modern critiques, nor have they offered a clearer understanding about what it means to practise humility or to be a humble person in contemporary society.
Works Cited in Appendix


Button, Mark. “‘A Monkish Kind of Virtue’? For and Against Humility.” *Political Theory* 33, no. 6 (December 2005): 840-868.


