"Divine wisdom and grace guided St. Frances..." A rhetorical analysis of the ultimate terms in the narratives of "The Little Flower of St. Francis"

Karen Feilzer Fishman
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“Divine wisdom and grace guided St. Francis . . .”

A Rhetorical Analysis of The Ultimate Terms In the Narratives of
The Little Flower of St. Francis

by

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B.S. Western Montana College
Dillon, MT, 1980

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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Storytelling has been a method of passing on the values and ideals of a culture almost since the beginning of the human's ability to communicate. The stories, or narratives, are an important method of engaging an audience and inducing readers to adopt the cultural values which are embedded in the narratives. An examination of the rhetoric used in the stories can serve to reveal the ideal image which the culture strives to emulate. The ideal or "tyrannizing" image of the culture can be uncovered through an inspection of the "ultimate terms" in the rhetoric.

The members of the culture exposed in the narratives of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* strives toward a specific "tyrannizing" image. An inspection of the ultimate terms in the narratives reveals God as the ideal image which the members attempt to model. The ultimate terms are connected to ancillary terms and it is in these ancillary terms that the values of the culture are revealed. The audience is moved to identify with and adopt the values in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* because the stories ring true to how they want to live their lives. Although the text was written in an earlier century, the audience will recognize that the stories portray qualities which are still relevant in contemporary times.
Acknowledgments

When I entered the Master’s program in the field of Communication Studies at the University of Montana, it had been close to twenty years since I had been on the learning end in the classroom. I was pretty apprehensive and I frequently questioned my abilities to accomplish all the requirements before me to actually earn a Master’s degree. In the process of teaching the classes (I was a teaching assistant), attending my graduate classes, reading the journal articles, writing the papers and ultimately completing this thesis, I encountered many people who came to my aid with much need encouragement. Colleagues and professors critiqued my writing (which disturbed me at first) and in the process prodded me toward my goal. The people who helped me the most deserve some recognition for their contributions to my success.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Christians throughout time have had to struggle to live out the tenets of their faith with overwhelming impediments from the societies in which they must function. Christians who live in the twenty-first century United States are not significantly different from their predecessors in this respect. The strong secular influence on Christians in this present age can contribute to a feeling of spiritual emptiness and a lack of connection with others within their community. The secular influence can also induce Christians to set aside the values they have learned through the teachings of their faith for those which appear to help them succeed in the secular world. Christians of the twenty-first century would benefit from the lessons of how others, much like themselves, succeeded in living out their faith in the face of an unsupportive society.

I will explore in this thesis how a text written in the thirteenth century, The Little Flowers of St. Francis, can influence and uplift Christians eight centuries later and provide guidance concerning some of the problems they face. Although the text has a uniquely Catholic flavor which some non-Catholic Christians may find unsettling, many of the lessons are universal and will appeal to many non-Catholic Christians. With the help of some tools of rhetorical analysis, I will argue that the lessons provided in The Little Flowers of St. Francis can be just as valid to the twenty-first century Christian as they might have been to the original audience.

Ours is a time of intense spiritual hunger. People are thirsting for
the sacred, the mysterious, the mystical. They are looking for more than a
good job, a full closet, a balanced checkbook. In a sense, this spiritual
yearning has flowed like a river throughout history, at times bubbling
under the surface, at other times overflowing its banks as men and
women relentlessly pursue spiritual fulfillment. I believe we may be in one
of these fiercely spiritual periods (p. 1)

This paragraph is on the first page of the book *The Lessons of St. Francis: How
to bring Simplicity and Spirituality into your Daily Life* (1997) by acclaimed musician and
author John Michael Talbot. Talbot relayed in conversation how the publishing
company, Penguin Putnam, approached him and other spiritual leaders of our times to
write books about the sacred for the secular. They expressed the pervading sense of
spiritual dryness in the country as the impetus for the desire for books of this type. The
publishing company also requested a book from His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his
contribution to addressing this spiritual dearth came in the form of *Ethics for the New
Millennium* (1999). In *Ethics*, the Dalai Lama depicts his perception of how the wealth of
the Western world contributes to the confusion with respect to the problem of how we
are to conduct ourselves in life (p. 10). He believes that our reliance on the external
achievements of science and material wealth contributes to the psychological and
emotional suffering that is apparent throughout much of the West. He maintains that
those living in the materially developed countries are less happy, less satisfied and suffer,
to some extent, more than those living in less developed countries.
The sense of spiritual dryness is intricately connected to the contemporary culture's pervading absorption in acquiring things. As a result, we lose the dream of happiness riches were to have provided us. People are "constantly tormented, torn between doubt about what might happen and the hope of gaining more, and plagued with mental and emotional suffering" (Dalai Lama, 1999, p. 5). It is difficult for those of us who have grown up on a steady diet of capitalism, consumer culture, and advertising to distinguish between the things we really need and the things we simply want. We are led to believe the things we want are in fact the things we need. We compare ourselves to our neighbors and find ourselves wanting, but the more we accumulate the more unhappy our society becomes. Advertising tells us that owning this car or that piece of furniture will bring us peace and happiness and when it doesn't we become more distressed. Many people, even practicing Christians, can get caught up in this cycle of work more to buy more only to become overwhelmed by a sense of distress and unhappiness that the very things that were supposed to bring peace, in reality, feel like a weight. Richard Foster (1981) writes in *Freedom of Simplicity*:

Contemporary culture is plagued by the passion to possess. The unreasoned boast abounds that the good life is found in accumulation, that "more is better." Indeed, we often accept this notion without question with the result that the lust for affluence in contemporary society has become psychotic: it has completely lost touch with reality. Furthermore, the pace of the modern world accentuates our sense of being
fractured and fragmented. We feel strained, hurried, breathless. The complexity of rushing to achieve and accumulate more and more frequently threatens to overwhelm us, it seems there is no escape from the rat race (p. 3).

In this crush and rush to gain more material wealth, it appears we don’t even have time to look at the people we love. Our families, the very people we are working to acquire for, become strangers to us. Over one half of the marriages today end in divorce (Talbot, 1989). Many fathers and mothers spend far more time at work than they do with their children. We move far away from our aging parents and then forget they may need our presence. But infinitely worse than this is the fact that we lose contact with our true, centered sense of self. We lose who we are in our drive to acquire things and if we do happen to have some leisure time, we no longer know how to use it to get back in touch with our inner spiritual being (Dalai Lama, 1999, Talbot 1997).

Many other authors have written a number books in the last twenty years expressing these same sentiments. Susan Gregory (1994) writes in Out of the Rat Race “we started climbing the mountain of success to reach the new and improved American Dream and ended up falling in the depths of hustle and bustle, broken relationships, excessive stress and despair” (p. 25). She offers a contemporary approach to relieving the stresses of this age by attending to our spiritual selves and she is not alone in her method. A small sampling of other titles available include Ordinary People as Monks and Mystics (1986), The Road Less Traveled (1978), Peace is Every Step (1991), Plain and Simple (1989) and Anatomy of the Spirit (1996) by such acclaimed authors as Marsha Sinetar,
Scott M. Peck, Thich Nhat Hanh, Sue Bender, and Caroline Myss respectively. These and other books, periodical articles and films attempt to act as guides for our individual return to our spiritual selves. In *Care of the Soul*, Thomas Moore (1992) expresses the conviction that “[t]he great malady of the twentieth century in all our troubles and affecting us individually and socially, is loss of soul” (p. xi). The sheer volume of literature available indicates the depth of this pervasive feeling of being caught adrift in a spiritual void.

As Talbot points out in his latest book, the ebb and flow of spiritual hunger has been evident throughout history. Author David Shi (1985) chronicles many of these periods in his book *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture*. People have dealt with the desire for increased spiritual awareness in a variety of ways. Recently, many books have been written about getting in touch with one’s spirituality by getting back to the land (Fields, et al, 1984; Elgin, 1993; Bender 1989). Others deal strictly with prayer and meditation (Merton, 1989; Williamson, 1995; Foster 1992). Still others maintain a life of simplicity as the method of choice (Talbot, 1989; Gregory, 1994; Dominguez, 1992). Ours is an era of overwhelming choices as authors from different walks of life attempt to speak to us in our need. The plethora of literature that has accumulated over the years is much too massive to even address. I maintain that many of the texts that have been written during past periods of spiritual awakening are still valid sources of guidance. I believe if we look to our past for assistance, we won’t have to continually “reinvent the wheel”.

5
There are many texts written long ago that have remained important pieces of literature and deserve recognition as a source for inspiration in our day. *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is one of these texts. These stories about St. Francis and his followers portrays what Stephen Covey (1989) calls the Character Ethic. He believes that Character Ethic teaches that there are basic principles of effective living and these are things like integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity and modesty. Covey contrasts the Character Ethic to the Personality Ethic which is based on quick-fix influence techniques, power strategies, communication skills, and positive attitudes. Covey (1989) contends that many problems society encounters today are a result of our falling away from the Character Ethic in favor of the Personality Ethic. People living by the Personality Ethic rely more on social comparison as a standard for success as opposed to being guided by one’s own deeper values and sense of self-worth. Members of a society which defines success in terms of public image and proficiency in public relation techniques, behaviors and attitudes become more judgmental of themselves and their peers. If people try to use the “human influence strategies and tactics” (Covey, 1989, p.21) prevalent in the Personality Ethic to induce others to act in a specific manner, they could be perceived as manipulative and breed distrust. Although many of the elements of the Personality Ethic might be necessary for success, they must be secondary traits and not the primary ones. The Character Ethic emphasizes value-driven decisions which allows people to embrace their own uniqueness and create their own definition of success. A society which lives by the Character Ethic might find each of the members more willing to accept each other as individuals with unique talents and
abilities. Members could contribute to the society with their own skills as well as accept themselves and each other without comparisons and judgments.

Covey (1989) also laments the lack of present day literature that portrays the elements of Character Ethic. St. Francis lived in accordance to the Character Ethic and the stories of The Little Flowers of St. Francis illuminate this: It is written in a manner that reveals his "strikingly natural humanness and soaring spiritual power" (Brown, 1958, p. 35). By reading about the deeds of St. Francis and his followers in The Little Flowers of St. Francis, I believe we can learn to reconnect to that spiritual center from which this Character Ethic stems.

While Covey (1989) relates to Character as an ethic which relies on basic principles of effective living, he also points out that these principles are value-driven within each individual. These principles are not only related to how we see ourselves but how we relate to others as well. Cultural critic Richard Sennett (1998) defines character similarly in that "it is the ethical value we place on our own desires and on our relations to others" (p. 10). The character of a person, according to Sennett (1998), relies on their connections to those in the world.

Sennett (1998) claims that the problem of character in modern capitalism stems from the lack of a shared narrative of difficulties and therefore no shared fate. This condition ultimately results in a corrosion of character. For Sennett (1998) character particularly focuses upon the long-term aspect of our emotional experience. Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through
the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a future end. Character concerns the personal traits which we value in ourselves and for which we seek to be valued by others. (p. 10)

Sennett (1998) contends that, because there is no practice of delayed gratification or pursuit of long-term goals, there is an uncertainty woven into the fabric of contemporary everyday life. This uncertainty leads to a lack of loyalty, commitment and effective living. People who live with uncertainty in their daily lives find it hard to embrace the qualities of the Character Ethic because these attributes appear contrary to what is required to achieve success. Contemporary people need to have a model to show them how to turn away from a preoccupation with self and move toward some larger identity. The move toward the larger identity would entail a fostering and promotion of the traits that make up the concept of Character Ethic.

The followers of St. Francis embraced the qualities that make up the Character Ethic and there are many examples of these qualities in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*. While Covey (1989) identified these traits as basic principles of effective living, William Bennett (1993) categorized these, plus other qualities, as “virtues.” He believes that “the vast majority of Americans share a respect for certain fundamental traits of character” (Bennett, 1993, p. 12) or virtues. His list of virtues include self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty and faith. These traits can also be viewed as important for a practicing Christian. Bennett (1993) defines moral education as “the training of heart and mind toward the good” (p. 11) and that it “involves rules and precepts as well as explicit instruction, exhortation, and training” (p.
11). According to Webster's New World Dictionary (1988), a virtue is a goodness or morality that leads to right thinking and action. These virtues are more than simply good things, they are absolutely necessary when considering the dynamics involved in being part of a community.

Man is not unless he is social; what he is depends on his social being and what he makes of his social being is irrevocably bound to what he makes of himself. He has the ability to master his internal being, and the main way to self-mastery leads to his joining with others like himself in social acts. (Etzioni as cited in Earley and Gibson, 1998)

It is commonly recognized that the United States is an individualistic society. Robert Bellah (1996) and his co-authors of Habits of the Heart agree that "individualism lies at the very core of American culture" (p. 142). Americans regard the concept of individualism as the way they want to lead their lives and, consequently, they value independence and self-reliance. With these qualities they expect, not only of themselves but others as well, to win the rewards of a competitive society. Besides money and its subsequent trappings, other rewards of a competitive, individualistic society are status, recognition and prestige. But there is a price to pay for living with this point of view, because one of the indicators of an individualistic society is that everyone looks out for themselves and their own primary interest. This would mean that members of this society would have less time and inclination to look out for others. People who live in an individualistic society live their lives in a manner that would exemplify that one's own self-interest is the proper goal for humans. Members of an individualistic society "are
fundamentally separate, unencumbered by obligations they did not choose; they are responsible for their own fates, authors of their own opinions, and makers of their own worlds” (Selznick, 1995, p. 34).

An individualistic culture isn’t necessarily problematic, but during the latter part of the twentieth century our American society has been becoming more self-oriented in our individualism. Since practicing Christians function in this culture, they are impacted by this change as well. According to Bellah (1996) and other authors (Selznick, 1995; Wolfson, 1997; Wolter, et al, 1993), the move our society is taking is turning away from the individualism that helps us achieve our goals and toward the individualism that excludes others from our concerns. Bellah (1996) has even gone as far as to describe the current individualism as cancerous to which Wolfson (1997) replies “cancerous it is, but its growth should not have been surprising. For the individualism we see before us today was consciously advocated by political and social reformers...who were repelled by what they took to be the excessive conformity and lack of individuality in 1950’s America” (p. 77). This modern individualism places a high demand on every person who belongs to the society in that it pushes and prods us to succeed by enticing us with big rewards. It is producing a way of life that does not enhance either the individual or society, and even the most articulate defenders of individualism in America are becoming more ambivalent about it (Bellah, 1996).

Many authors and social critics are pointing to this individualism as a source of corruption for our society and so claim that we need to return to a greater sense of community (Sennett, 1998; Covey, 1989; Bellah, 1996; Selznick, 1995). Bellah (1996)
remarks that "much of what has been happening to our society has been undermining our sense of community at every level" (p. xxx). These authors are not advocating a complete disposal of individualism but instead are calling for a greater balance between individualism and community. The pervasive belief is that a return to a commitment to community would be beneficial for both the individuals in the community and for society as a whole. Wolter and O'Neill (1993) write:

Today, on the eve of the twenty-first century, a new transformation of consciousness is needed. For we have entered the space age and can see from the eyes of the astronaut that our earth is mankind's God-given space ship for its journey through history. No longer can we tolerate the exploitation of its limited life sustaining resources by egotistic individuals, by local groups, by rival sovereignties, or multinational organizations. We live in an interdependent world in which rugged individualism in any shape or form has no future. [We are] entering the transition from individual to global consciousness that will bring back an awareness of community. (p. 7)

The kind of community envisioned is not like some of those in the past that disregarded human rights and democratic processes, but ones that encourage equality of opportunity and moral ideals. Being an active member of a community calls for more cooperation, more solidarity, more discipline and more responsibility between and among members of that community. "The most familiar connotation of 'community' is solidarity based on consciousness of kind" (Selznick, 1995, p.34). But that is not the only concept of community. Community can be a framework for a diversity of activities
and, just as importantly, autonomous choices which allows a member to decide for themselves how they want to contribute. This is contrasted with those communities which have a hierarchical structure in which the leaders determine each member’s involvement. A community may form based on relationships that result from shared values stemming from common goals, interests, and mutual commitments. Richard Sennett (1998) sees communities as encouraging long term values like obligation, trustworthiness, commitment and purpose, loyalty and resolution. The experience of community encourages and supports person-centered relationships and not self-serving decisions which are not beneficial to the community as a whole. The primary advantage of community is the enhancement of the responsibility of the members one for another as well as the interest of the community itself. Being part of a community promotes and depends on the personal virtues of commitment, caring, discipline and self-transcendence (Selznick, 1997). To become a member of a community would involve making a conscious choice to become involved. As I will explain later, a community can have its own culture. The community described in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is an example of a community with a distinct culture.

*The Little Flowers of St. Francis*

St. Francis of Assisi is undoubtedly the most well-known saint who has ever lived. His name is recognized and respected in both the religious sense, since he founded one of the most prolific religious orders still active today, and the secular sense. In the secular world, St. Francis is known as the “world’s most sincere Democrat” (Cuomo,
1984) and revered as the patron saint of ecology (Armstrong, 1973). Many books have been, and continue to be, written about his life (Feldner, 1925/1982; Williamson, 1973; Talbot 1997) and many people still study his teachings. These teachings and way of life are not only found in his two official biographies but in other writings from the 13th century as well. In 1983 the Franciscan Herald Press reissued a compilation of writings about and by St. Francis that were written during the 13th and 14th century. These works have remained viable through the years and have been translated into many languages including English. One of the works the Franciscan Herald Press included in the St. Francis of Assisi Omnibus of Sources is The Little Flowers of St. Francis.

The Little Flowers of St. Francis (originally known as The Actus) was written approximately 100 years after St. Francis died. The author is believed to be Brother Ugolino di Monte Santa Maria, a Franciscan monk who was profoundly affected by the dissension and discord already in the order not even 100 years after the founder’s death. In 1276, the General Chapter of the Franciscan Order sent out a general call for additional material concerning St. Francis and his original companions. Brother Ugolino started compiling notes of the stories he heard the older friars tell about St. Francis and some of his first followers. Brother Ugolino’s principle informant was a lay brother named James of Massa who knew many of the favorite companions of St. Francis. Thus the stories had been handed down in the oral tradition that was vitally important during the early centuries.

Sometime between 1370 and 1385, an unknown friar decided to translate The Actus, which originally was written in Latin, into Italian. He took 53 of the most
appealing chapters and compiled them into the form we have today. He also took 5 of
the remaining chapters plus texts from Thomas of Celano and St. Bonaventure (authors of
the two official biographies), various 14th century writings and local oral traditions and
wrote *The Considerations on the Holy Stigmata*. Subsequently, this work has always
been attached to and seen as a part of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*.

The particular translation of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* I will use was
published in 1958 and is the translation included in the previously mentioned *St. Francis
of Assisi Omnibus of Sources*. Raphael Brown translated the work from its original Latin
and Italian. At the time, it was 1 of only 7 translations into English. This work is
worthy of analysis because of all of the works that could have been kept and passed
down, this was one that has endured through time. *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* has
been scrutinized over the years and in some periods appeared destined for extinction. But
it has always been revived and has gained increasing popularity during the 20th century.

Some people might say that it is the popularity of the saint himself that keeps
this work alive. Others may attribute the longevity of the writings to the talent for prose
of the Italian translator. Others believe it is the way that the *Fioretti* (Little Flowers)
reflects the magnetic spiritually of St. Francis that keeps the work so vibrant and alive.
Many people in the 20th century read *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* to learn the great
lessons of joy and peace that St. Francis is so noted for. My question is how does this
book speak to these people? What is it about the way the words are written that moves
their heart to be more Christ-like? What is it about the way these stories are portrayed
that conveys the message of peace and joy in God and life? And possibly most
importantly, how can the work speak to Christians trying to cope with the spiritual dryness found in this day and age?

**Historical/Contextual Analysis**

*The Little Flowers of St. Francis* was written about another period of intense spiritual hunger that Talbot (1997) was referring to. To understand the historical significance and the importance of the timing of this document, we must consider some aspects that influenced the culture and the people and contributed to the spiritual dearth of St. Francis’s time. The first significant area to illuminate is what was occurring in Italy and the Roman Catholic Church during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The government of Italy and the Roman Church were so intricately woven together during that era, that it is impossible to separate them (Southern, 1970). It was during this time that Saint Francis was born and ultimately made his stand for a return to gospel living. Next, it is important to understand who St. Francis was and why he made such an impact on the people of his time. Finally, this essay will narrow the focus to the happenings in the Franciscan movement from the time of Francis’s death to the time *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* was compiled and the import of the document concerning the order.

**The Church**

Although the Roman Church had significant influence over the entire population of the western world at the turn of the first millennium, in Italy it was perceived largely as a political power. “The identification of the church with the whole of organized society is the fundamental feature which distinguishes the Middle Ages from earlier and
later periods of history (Southern, 1970, p. 16). The papacy became as much a political as spiritual entity during the epoch of Gregory the Great (590-604) and remained so well into the fourteenth century. Although there was great spiritual and intellectual activity in the medieval church, a large part of the church’s work visible to the Italian citizens was related to political dealings. The Church was just as concerned with gaining landholdings and wielding judicial influence as it was about the spiritual, cultural and artistic betterment of the people. It based its right to political and territorial expansions on a document written in the eight century known as the ‘Donation of Constantine’, a document which offers a “very clear and complete view of papal power” (Southern, 1970, p. 92). During the period of time after the document was written, the pope expanded his temporal possession by donations from wealthy laity. A large portion of land was donated by the ruler Pippin the Frank (aka Pipin the Short) in 754. He had conquered much of Northern Italy, an area known as the Byzantine Exarchate, and to prevent it from falling into the wrong hands, he donated it to the Holy See. The cession of the Lombard duchy of Benevento to the Holy See added more land in 1052, and the transfer of some Tuscan territories on Italy’s western coast land came in 1082 (Southern, 1970). The Pope had no army and no means to protect the Church’s holdings by force, so they were protected by papal jurisprudence. This system of the church owning the land that the people worked became interwoven with the Italian society and consequently with the government of that society. “The medieval church was a state” with all of the “apparatus of the state: laws and law courts, taxes and tax-collectors, a great administrative machine, power of life and death over the citizens of Christendom and their enemies within and without” (Southern,
The Church and society were so co-mingled that neither one could undergo a change without the other experiencing a similar transformation.

Land was only a portion of the wealth of the Church. The social system was primarily a feudal hierarchy and so what was produced by those who worked the Church's land was also owned by the Church and not the workers. The Church could sell the wheat, cattle or whatever and buy many of the trappings of wealth such as gold, buildings, art, crystal or more land. Because the Bishop of Rome was one of the richest and most powerful of Italian landowners, he became one of the leading sovereign powers of Italy. This led to corruption within the spiritual authority of the Church. The authorities of the church imposed higher tithes, fees and levies to get the church more gold and gave local potentates the power to enforce this by the point of the sword (Davies, 1996). Authorities also made use of the threat of excommunication and damnation to keep the local powers in line. "[T]he Church's policy to sacerdotize the social fabric of Italy was to secularize the Church, to cause the Church to do as the world does" (Feldner, 1925/1982). Thus the social evils inherent in the feudal system became evident. It was implied that by extensive gradation, the lower class were ruled by the higher and the Pope was the highest.

Pope Innocent III was elected Pope in 1198 and thereby became the feudal overlord of all of the Church's holdings. He was no more or less corrupt than any other pope but by virtue of his guardianship of Frederick II, the rightful heir to the kingship of Italy, Innocent tried to impose his lordship over all of the monarchies of Europe.

Frederick was four years old when his father died. It was at this time that Frederick's
mother declared Innocent III his guardian. Prior to this, when Frederick was a baby, he was elected King of Rome and was also recognized as having hereditary rights to the German crown. It was Innocent’s opinion that the monarchy should be subject to the influence of the more powerful Papacy. Because Innocent III was the guardian of a king, he believed himself to have the right to do such things as encourage the sacking of Constantinople and keep the spoils (1202-1204) (Southern, 1970). He was the instigator of the devastation of a great part of southern France and also encouraged Otto, the enemy of Frederick, to invade the south of Italy and then crowned him King of Rome. Innocent III then turned against Otto, excommunicated him and helped contribute to his demise.

Innocent III professed ascetic ideas but was full of ambition and worldliness. He was as much a feudal overlord as any previous pope and had the crown to support him. But during his papacy, the monetary and economic systems were going under an essential change which led the lower classes to aspire after fuller liberty and independence. The ‘minores’, the artisans and smaller merchants, started to struggle for equal rights with the ‘maiores’, the ruling class that consisted of the wealthy merchants, the nobles and the knights. The minores wanted a better life with more money and rights and since they were not serfs, they were not beholden to the land owners. They banded together in some towns and took up arms against the ruling class. Many of the wealthy were run out of their towns and the serfs claimed some of the lands to work as their own. The Papacy could no longer control these people by the old methods and threats. The Church hierarchy was not viewed by lay people with the same reverence as before and consequently was perceived as an outdated and antiquated system (Davies, 1996).
New religious movements began to spring up at this time. They were actively criticizing the Church claiming that she had neglected her duties. They decried bishops as worldlings who extorted money and abandoned their dioceses. Priests were said to toady to the rich and were arrogant to the poor. Many priests were considered illiterate men with bad manners and even worse morals. Many people abandoned the church and were branded heretics. Leaders of two of these movements were Peter Waldo and Joachim of Fiore. Waldo and his followers, the Waldensians, preached without episcopal permission and, against papal authority, translated portions of Scripture into the vernacular (Thomson, 1963). Joachim’s doctrines called for a return to primitive Christianity, a renunciation of riches and a simplification of the monastic institution (Moorman, 1968).

Into this morass came a humble and devout man who did not rebel nor openly malign the Church. Into this morass came the man that would be later canonized as St. Francis of Assisi.

Francis was born Francesco Giovanni Bernardone in 1182 into the family of a wealthy cloth merchant. He grew up with every good thing that could be had and wanted for nothing. He spent his early adult years carousing and freely spending his father’s money on wine, women and song. In the first official biography of St. Francis by Thomas of Celano (d. 1246), it is said “he outdid all his contemporaries in vanities and he came to be a promoter of evil and was abundantly zealous for all kinds of foolishness” (p. 230). Something significant had to have happened to change the heart of this wanton squanderer of time and money. When Francis was about twenty-five years old, God
visited him in a series of visions that prompted Francis to begin to hold in contempt all
the worldly things he admired before. In the third vision, God told Francis to “go and
repair my church” (Moorman, 1968) but the import of this directive was not understood
until long after Francis’s death. Francis thought he was supposed to physically rebuild
the church of San Damiano which was falling into disrepair and ruin. He renounced
worldly things and embraced his lover, Lady Poverty. He begged for food, clothing and
items to repair the church. He professed a love of Jesus Christ that was beyond
comprehension and preached it to whomever would listen. People believed him to be
crazy at first. They rejected him and his words. But after some months they started to
listen and be converted. By 1209 Francis had 11 followers who wanted to live as he did
and were helping him in his ministries. Thomas of Celano (d. 1246) writes:

When Blessed Francis saw that the Lord God was daily adding to their
number, he wrote for himself and his brothers, a form of life and rule, using for the
most part the words of the holy Gospel, for the perfection of which he alone
yearned. (p. 254)

Francis took this rule of life and his 11 followers and walked to Rome to acquire approval
of the new Order from Pope Innocent III. This marks the date of the birth of the Order of
Friars Minor (OFM) and the Franciscan movement.

Francis was popular for many reasons and it is not the purpose of this essay to
illuminate them all. Suffice it to say that by the time he died in 1226, there were
thousands of people enrolled in the various forms of the Franciscan movement. The
ideals of poverty, obedience and simplicity were some of the fundamental beliefs of the
Order that were attractive to and embraced by many lay people. Olschki (1949) writes “the serene acceptance of a divine order had a different effect on the Italian character than submissive acceptance of feudal discipline or subservience to a theocratic authority” (p. 77). Simplicity implied having less to be concerned about, less things taking up time and energy. Living the simple life was probably not much different than the life many were living already, but actively embracing it gave a different meaning to the life. Many wealthy people also chose this life and gave up great riches to live as Francis did. Charity became a universal virtue and not just a privilege of wealthier people. Poverty was acceptable when it meant using things wisely and sparingly as opposed to not having them. Poverty was looked on as beautiful because it released men from the unnecessary encumbrance of excess paraphernalia while drawing them nearer to God (Feldner, 1925/1982). The spirit of obedience animated all the members of this early Franciscan family. Those who embraced Francis’s teaching found it was easier to be obedient to a spiritual leader who was compassionate than to a feudal overlord who didn’t care.

The Italian laity believed they finally obtained an active spiritual guidance and an ethical code that all could embrace regardless of status, wealth, or religious affiliation. Francis’s preaching and way of life had such an effect on his hearers, many wanted to join his order. Unfortunately, the makeup of the Order made this an impossibility. The first community was composed of celibate men who lived, ate, worked, and slept together and only single, celibate men could join them. The secular way of following the path of St. Francis was to come at a later date.
The Order of Friars Minor was the community of celibate men who lived and traveled together. There was no place for celibate women, or married men and women. In 1212, Francis accepted the first celibate woman into the way of life later denoted the Poor Clares. He found a place for her to live and she was joined shortly thereafter by other celibate women, including her mother and sister, desiring this life. So now both celibate men and celibate women were able to live the austere, consecrated life in community but married people or those with children were not allowed to join. There were many people who were filled with the spirit of renunciation and longed to adopt a life of simplicity and discipline while continuing to care for their children and doing work that could not easily be abandoned. In 1214, Francis wrote a ‘Letter to all the Faithful’ laying down the principles that a religious life could be based on for these lay followers (Moorman, 1968) and thus began the Third Order of Penitents. Rules eventually were written for these two new expressions similar to the one for the Order of Friars Minor.

The birth of the Order and the growth of the community was not an easy time for Francis. There were always those who wanted to buck the system and relax the rule. Francis never wanted to be the founder and leader of an Order. He just wanted to live the gospel life. Eventually he turned over the leadership of the Order to others so he could pray when he wanted and preach when he felt led. Trouble started in the Order even before Francis died but many of his original followers were still around to help keep things going in the same direction Francis originally desired. Francis died October 4, 1226 and was canonized a saint by Pope Gregory IX in 1228. The real trouble in the Order began after Francis died.
Dissension In The Order

In his introduction to *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, translator Raphael Brown explains that:

Owing to a number of factors such as the extreme loftiness of the Saint’s ideal and way of life and the amazingly rapid expansion of the Order - to say nothing of our fallen human nature - three more or less clearly identifiable groups began to evolve among his many followers after his death. (p. 19)

The first group can be described as the ‘laxists’ or the ‘relaxers’ (Moorman, 1968). This group thought that the Rule of the Order was too strict concerning owning property and wanted to own the land and buildings they used thereby reducing their ideals to that of other religious orders active at the time. They also wanted to own their books and sought things that were considered by other Franciscans as excesses in scholastic activity.

Brown (1958) accuses them of abandoning Franciscan poverty and contemplation in all but name. The second group was the ‘moderates’, or Conventuals. This group avoided excesses in any direction and truly were moderate in their practice of the Franciscan way of life. They believed that the Rule was to be lived as it was written and there didn’t need to be many alterations to fulfill the mission of the Order in the world. These men wanted to continue living the life Francis had laid out for them. This way of life included both an active aspect, the brothers became mendicant ministers, and a contemplative aspect, they retreated into a cloistered setting and engaged in intense and uninterrupted prayer. They saw no reason for a reinterpretation of the Rule or a change in procedure. The last group was the one that caused the most problems simply because they espoused many ideals
that the moderates found worthy but took them too far. This group, the ‘rigorists’, or Spirituals, condemned reasonable use of things as sanctioned by the church and attempted to practice poverty on different conditions than those of the first years of the Order. Their strict interpretation of the Rule rendered the apostolic and literary activity of the Conventuals nearly impossible. They stressed the contemplative life at the expense of the mixed active/contemplative life Francis describes. They equated the Rule with the Gospel and held it as divinely inspired, something Francis never claimed. They held to a divisive Joachimist idea of a carnal church persecuting a spiritual church so they withdrew from obedience to the Roman Church in the name of St. Francis. This was in direct contradiction to the ideal of Francis of “humble supernatural submission to the authority of the Church” (Brown, 1958). Franciscan scholar Hilarin Feldner, O.M.Cap (1925/1982) makes this claim about the Spirituals:

Only the Spirituals took...an extremely rigorous stand, allowed the study of theology and the apostolate to languish more and more, rebelled against the church, and were shipwrecked on the reefs of fanaticism (p. 377).

so that

For the very reason that many brothers lost sight of...the practise [sic] of Franciscan poverty, they provoked that unhappy dispute of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, which inflicted serious wounds on the Church and society, and particularly the Order itself (p. 119).

The Spirituals were given a directive from the Pope, either relinquish some of their fanatical ideals or leave the Order. The problem was, as stated previously, there were
many moderates who embraced the harder line of the rigorists but not to the extent of fanaticism. Some of these moderates lived in a region known as The Marches. Among those living in The Marches was a friar named Brother Ugolino. He was impacted by many of the ideals of the Spirituals and so when a call went out in 1276 for additional materials on St. Francis, Ugolino started keeping notes on the stories told by many of Francis’s original followers. These followers were also concerned that the Order may not continue to follow the strict Rule of St. Francis and didn’t want to see the rigorists pushed out. Neither did they want to have the rigorists maintain their zealous stance. In the process of keeping notes on the stories from the followers, Ugolino made sure he focused on the stories that would emphasize the true spirituality of the Order. Two official biographies had already been written about Francis. The first one by Thomas of Celano stressed the stringency of the Rule while the second by St. Bonaventure portrayed a slightly more relaxed Francis. Many of the Friars were disappointed with the second biography and wanted Francis to be depicted as they experienced him. When Ugolino officially compiled his notes into the *Actus Beati Francisci et Sociorum Ejus* (The Deeds of St. Francis and His Companions), around 1327 to 1335, he followed the stricter portrayal of Francis. It was approximately 50 years later that the unknown Italian friar translated the *Actus* into Italian and it became known as *The Little Flowers of St. Francis.*

This document along with other Franciscan literature helped the Church to “regain some of her ancient moral grandeur and moral influence - not through Popes and cardinals, but through the revival in humbler hearts of the spirit of Christian love and unworldliness, as practised [sic] by St. Francis” (Feldner, 1925/1982).
St. Francis lived during a time of spiritual crisis. The Roman Church was a very important part of the lives of the people in the thirteenth century but the people felt it could no longer be trusted as a spiritual leader. They believed they had no guidance or leadership in a vital area of their lives. They were hurt by the deception and oppression by the representatives of Christ on the earth. St. Francis gave them hope that God was still alive and present in the world and they could once again experience a healing of the spirit.

Many people in the 20th century United States also feel deceived and oppressed. They are hurt because they were told that the American Dream of material wealth would make them happy but it does not. Their measure of success depends on what they have and not who they are. They can not trust the leaders of society who told them these lies and they feel as if they have no where to turn. The simplicity St. Francis exemplifies can be the guide to which the people of the 20th century turn. The stories in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* portrays the Character Ethic embodied by St. Francis of Assisi and people of the United States can be encouraged by reading them and following his lead.

Outline of Chapters

In this chapter, I have argued that there is a spiritual dryness being experience by contemporary society. Modern authors agree that this spiritual dryness is due in part to the overwhelming endorsedment of individualism and the accumulation of wealth as well as a lack of a sense of community in conjunction with embracing an ethic that lacks character. Although contemporary Christians do profess a sense of spirituality, they are not immune from the dryness that authors have addressed. Stories have always been a
method of persuading people to adopt specific values. *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is an example of an old text which has values at the core of its message.

In chapter two, I will explain the theories that drive this analysis. I will demonstrate how extracting the tyrannizing image of a culture, such as the one described in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, can help clarify why the community endorses the values that it imparts in the narratives. By examining the narratives, we can also reveal other important information about the culture that the text describes and help contemporary Christians appreciate the text as an important contribution to their spirituality.

Chapter three is the primary chapter of analysis of the narratives. The narratives reveal the culture’s identity and the process of analysis answers the question of the audience’s response to the identity. If the audience identifies with the values, characters and “good reasons” of the culture, then the stories maintain a sense of fidelity for the audience. In extracting the tyrannizing image, I explain how the “god terms” and “devil terms” function in the narratives as well as contribute to the identity of the culture. Probability is also an important factor when evaluating narratives. The analysis addresses this issue in conjunction with the fidelity of the narratives and the audience identification.

The fourth chapter is the final chapter of this thesis and functions as a conclusion in which I discuss the value of extracting the ultimate terms and the employing the narrative theory as a method the analysis. I review each model in terms of analyzing the text as well the merit of combining them in a single analysis. The narrative theory exposes the identity and values of the text while the ultimate terms point to the
tyrannizing image which drives the members to embrace those values. I also argue in this chapter the contributions this essay makes to rhetorical theory specifically in terms of the narrative model of criticism.

In the introduction of this composition, I have argued that narratives which are not modern have a distinct usefulness for a contemporary audience. Specifically, I argue that *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* has benefit for twenty-first century Christians and can provide guidance although it is over seven hundred years old. This and other old texts deserve the attention of scholars and students as sources of wisdom and information.
Chapter Two

Theoretical Issues

Chiam Perelman advanced the argument that rhetoric should be "the study of the discursive techniques allowing us to induce or increase the man's adherence to the thesis presented for its assent" (Fisher, 1987, p. 17, emphasis his). Kenneth Burke views rhetoric as the "symbolic function of inducement, rather than a form of discourse" (Fisher, 1987, p. 18). He sees rhetoric as an attribute of all symbolic expression and action that arises whenever we attribute meanings to symbols. Consequently, where there is meaning there is persuasion. But most fundamentally, the rhetorical experience is a symbolic transaction in and about social reality. These symbolic transactions in rhetoric can be uncovered through a variety of methods. This essay will rely on the use of ultimate terms and the narrative theory to reveal the final social reality found within The Little Flowers of St. Francis.

Ultimate Terms and the Tyrannizing Image

The esteemed rhetorician, Richard Weaver (1948, 1953, 1964), wrote about a theory that had a "tyrannizing image" at its focal point. Surrounding the tyrannizing image, were "ultimate terms" that supported the tyrannizing image and drove members of a culture toward that image. These terms were labeled "god terms," "devil terms," and "charismatic terms." To fully understand the importance of these terms and how they apply to a culture, one must comprehend how Weaver (1948, 1953, 1964) derives his theory. For this particular aspect of his theory, Weaver (1948, 1953, 1964) starts with a
broad view of the nature of a human being and focuses in on a specific part of the nature that the ultimate terms impacts.

Weaver (1964) rests his perspective of rhetoric on the view that the human being is composed of body, soul and mind. The body refers simply to the physical being that is home to the soul and mind and is primarily concerned with sensory pleasure and excessive external satisfaction. The soul, or spirit, is an “integrative power binding the individual into an intellectual, emotional and spiritual unity which is his highest self” (Weaver, 1964, p. 43). It is a composite of “wishes and hopes, of things transfigured, of imaginations and value transcriptions” (Weaver, 1964, p. 9). The soul guides both the mind and the body in the direction it has been trained; towards either the good or evil.

Weaver’s (1964) perception of the mind is more involved and is the basis for the conception of the ultimate terms. The third aspect of the human being, the mind, is a complex combination of “four faculties or modes of apprehension” (Foss, et al, 1991). The first mode is the emotional or aesthetic faculty. This faculty is primarily contemplative and allows for the experiences of pain, pleasure and beauty. The second faculty is that of the ethical; this capacity allows the determination of the order of goods and judges between right and wrong. The religious capacity “involves a yearning for something infinite and provides individuals with a glimpse of their destiny and ultimate nature” (Foss, et al, 1991, p. 59). The fourth and final mode of apprehension is that of the rational or cognitive capacity. From this capacity human beings are provided with knowledge which enables them to define concepts, order ideas, etc.
Weaver (1964) divides this fourth faculty, the rational or cognitive capacity, into three kinds or levels of conscious reflection, ideas, beliefs and the metaphysical dream.

At the idea level, human beings are concerned with the thoughts and facts of daily life and simply existing. "At this level we respond to impinging circumstances in a habitual manner and with little deliberation" (Foss, et al, 1991, p. 60). At the second level lay the beliefs, convictions, theories, generalizations, laws, or concepts that we have inherited or formulated over the span of our life. It is at this level we are able to conceive generalizations and theories from the brute facts we acquire at the first level. The third level, that of the metaphysical dream, is the level of the philosophical opinion. This is where we conceive the commentary about the statements that are based in the second level. "Because it concerns values and ideals, this is the level to which both ideas or facts and beliefs are ultimately referred to for verification; it provides judgmental standards for the evaluation of all other knowledge" (Foss, et al, 1991, p. 60). There is always a connection made between the facts from the first level and the ideals of the third level because the facts of the first are being interpreted in terms of the ideals of the third.

Truth also resides at the third level. Weaver (1948) contends that truth is the degree to which things and ideas in the material world comply with their ideals, archetypes and essences. It is the ultimate truth of the metaphysical dream that is conveyed to cultures through language. Without this metaphysical dream "it is impossible to think of men living together harmoniously over an extent of time. The dream carries with it an evaluation, which is the bond of spiritual community" (Weaver,
But to understand Weaver's (1948) concept of the metaphysical dream, we must understand his conception of culture.

Culture is a difficult concept to define clearly. A culture is not made up of the material comforts that cater to the sensations, rather it consists of many little things of the imagination and inward tendencies. We don't define a culture, it defines itself by "crystallizing around ... feelings which determine a common attitude toward phases of experience; ... They originate in our world view, in our ultimate vision of what is proper for men as high beings" (Weaver, 1968. p. 39-40)

No one has been able to define exactly how a culture integrates and homologizes the ideas and actions of many men over a long period of time any more than how the consciousness gives a thematic continuity to the life of an individual. As far as one can tell, the collective consciousness of the group creates a mode of looking at the world or arrives at some imaginative visual bearing. It "sees" the world metaphorically according to some felt need of the group, and this entails an ordering which denotes dissatisfaction with "things as they are." (Weaver, 1964, p.10)

Every culture in the formation process creates a guideline from which the members are reticent to deviate. There may be no more than a cultural discipline if the members violate the guideline but sometimes it can be a moral or legal penalty. It is simply not feasible for everyone to do everything any way he wants to if the culture is to assume form and survive. At the heart of every culture is a center of authority from which proceeds subtle and pervasive pressures to conform and view the nonconforming as
disruptive. At this center of the culture is the "tyrannizing image" which draws everything toward itself (Weaver, 1948, 1953, 1964, 1968). This center which "commands all things . . . is open to imaginative but not logical discovery. It is a focus of value, a law of relationships, an inspiriting vision. By its nature it sets up rankings and orders" (Foss, et al, 1991, p. 62). This image is the cultural ideal or vision of excellence a society sees as perfection and for which it strives. Because the image depicts an ideal of excellence, it instigates the establishment of societal distinctions depending on the degree of conformity to that ideal. The narratives of The Little Flowers of St. Francis identify a culture with a tyrannizing image at its center. I will identify and discuss this image in my analysis.

The tyrannizing image at the center of our culture contributes to our metaphysical dream because it positions itself between us and our practical experiences. The conception of a value that is derived from the tyrannizing image is expressed by the rhetoric of the culture and the rhetor through a system of arguments, grammatical categories and ultimate terms. The rhetoric ideally moves the individual in the direction of the image and enables the members of a culture to talk together because they share a basic premise. It functions further than the individual to unite all the minds of the culture in their pursuit for the realization of the tyrannizing image.

Because rhetoric deals with action in real situations at the same time that it concerns ideals, it "is an essential ingredient of social cohesion"; it has an inevitable connection to culture. Because rhetoric emanates from a group's
imaginative picture” of the world or its tyrannizing image, it functions as a bond for the members of a culture. It conveys the permanent values of the culture and thus serves as a “common denominator of truth” for its members. Rhetoric, then, urges the individuals of a culture to move toward the tyrannizing image by acting in ways that bring them closer to that image. (Foss, et al, 1991, p. 65)

One way to reveal the values and ideals, or the tyrannizing image, held by a culture is to examine the rhetoric utilizing a system to uncover the “ultimate terms” on which the culture relies. Ultimate terms are rhetorical absolutes that are usually undisputed and generally adhered to by the constituents of a culture. They are terms that receive the highest respect from the populace and are attributed the greatest endorsement. Ultimate terms are a principal rhetorical agent for persuading individuals to push onward toward the tyrannizing image because they represent that ideal. The ultimate terms in any given society carry the greatest potency because they point to some ultimate source of power and are a prime mover of human impulse (Weaver, 1953).

Weaver (1953) identifies three major categories of ultimate terms: “god,” “devil,” and “charismatic terms.” The Little Flowers of St. Francis contains at least one representative of a “god” term and a “devil” term but no “charismatic” terms. The “god term” is that expression which is ranked as having the most power and to which all other expressions are subordinate. Its force conveys to the other expressions their reduced degree of force and fixes the scale by which degrees of comparison are understood. One of the surest indicators of the “god term” is its capacity to demand sacrifice “for when a term is so sacrosanct that the material goods of this life must be mysteriously rendered up
for it, then we feel justified in saying that it is in some sense ultimate” (Weaver, 1953, p. 214). The driving force behind the development of the “god term” stems from the nature of the conscious life of humans to revolve around some concept of value. They must know where they are in the ideological cosmos to be able to conform their endeavors to their culture. If this specific concept of value is removed or thrust into competition with other concepts, the human being suffers an almost unbearable sense of being lost. The “god term” conveys the utmost blessing in a culture but then also has the greatest potential to exact sacrifice from the members (Weaver, 1953).

In past cultures, the impetus for the tyrannizing image was the presence of a strong and evenly diffused religion therefore the “god terms” were fairly evident. In the absence of this religion, the “god terms” may not be easily discerned since there may be several terms competing for primacy. Modern human beings have “been conditioned to believe that the powers and processes which have transformed their material world represent a very sure form of knowledge” (Weaver, 1953, p. 216 emphasis mine). This development leads to a variety of terms that are competing as the ultimate generator of the force driving the culture. One of the terms identified in recent times is “progress” which leads to referents such as “progressive leader” or “progressive community”. Another current term vying for power is “science”. “Science” and “progress” are considered hypostatized terms in that they are conceptual ideas treated as concrete realities (Weaver, 1953). “Science says . . .” or “progress demands . . .” are illustrations of how the terms are used without any specific or concrete referent and the fact that a word is not used very analytically may increase its rhetorical potential.
On the other end of the spectrum are terms of repulsion so powerful that they cannot be ignored. These terms are the counterparts of the "god terms" and are classified as "devil terms." The "devil terms" are slightly different from the "god terms" in that the critic has a difficult time determining and explaining how they generate their peculiar force of repudiation. The only criteria for the "devil terms" is that they are publicly agreed upon as personifications of the adversary. Some examples from our culture's past "devil terms" are "un-American," "pro-German," or "Yankee." The "devil terms" are important to draw a society together against a common enemy especially if there is no other nation offered as the scapegoat.

In summary, a culture has at its center a tyrannizing image that the members strive to attain. This image is not discerned by directly analyzing the rhetoric of the culture but rather indirectly through the "god terms" and "devil terms" within the rhetoric. The "god terms" have the most power and other terms in the rhetoric are subordinate to them. "Devil terms" are the counterpart of the "god terms" and serve as repellents. The culture moves away from these and toward the tyrannizing image. Through the extraction of these ultimate terms from the rhetoric of a culture, we can reveal the ideals and values the members strive for.

An appropriate method to extract these ultimate terms is to apply the narrative theory to the text. This theory provides the tools necessary to get at the "god," and "devil" terms as well as determine the power of the stories in which these terms are embedded. The narrative theory also provides a method to determine the power of the author to induce identification of the audience with the people in the stories.
Identification occurs when the audience “accepts or rejects the same ideas, people, and institutions” (Brock, 1990, p. 187) that the author uses which reveals his attitudes.

The Narrative Theory

Noted rhetorician Walter Fisher (1984) advanced a philosophical statement that offered an approach to interpretation and assessment of human communication. He assumed that all forms of human communication, or symbolic transactions, can be seen fundamentally as stories or narratives. Since the time Fisher (1984) proposed that narrative rationality could be viewed as a paradigm, there has been an ongoing discussion among scholars of rhetoric about the status of narrative (See Fisher, 1985; Lucaites and Condit 1985; Rowland, 1987; Rowland, 1989; and Warnick, 1987). Scholars may disagree whether the narrative is a paradigm or a theory and accept Rowland’s (1987) assertion that “narrative theory has not yet reached the point that it makes sense to treat narrative as a paradigm rather than a mode of discourse. For now at least, narrative should be studied . . . as one of many rhetorical devices for persuading an audience” (p. 274). Ultimately, the narrative approach is a theory or perspective that is considered one of a number of ways to account for how people come to be persuaded by stories that can guide their behavior. I concur with Rowland’s opinion and also Warnick’s (1987) when she states “narrative rationality is really a system of critical criteria that may be variously brought into play depending on the nature of the text to be assessed” (p. 181). In my analysis of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* I will use the system of elements that Fisher (1987/1989) forwards as the make up of a paradigm, but I will treat them as elements of a
theory. Fisher (1987/1989) asserts that the narrative rationality is a theory that recognizes "culture and character" (p. 98). The intent of this composition is to suggest a modified version of the narrative theory which includes a method of extracting the culture and character from the text.

It is appropriate to apply the narrative theory to *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* because the text is a series of narratives by two authors about St. Francis and some of his followers. Although many of the stories are about St. Francis and followers who interacted with him, some of the narratives are illustrations of Friars who belonged to his Order after he died. As stated previously in this essay, the initial stories were passed on orally and compiled by a single author who gathered them from a variety of sources. The time period covered by the narratives is approximately 120 years and even the text declared itself a narrative when the author wrote "as will be narrated hereafter" (Brown, 1958, p. 45). For the devotees to St. Francis these "narratives are more than simple chronicles of events; they give shape to the forward movement of time, suggesting reasons why things happen, showing their consequences" (Sennett, 1998, p. 30).

The narrative theory sees people as storytellers, as authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature. It stresses that people are full participants in the making of the messages they encounter whether they are the authors or the audience members (co-authors). We can imagine the narrative impulse as inherent in us as human beings because we acquire narrativity in the natural process of socialization. Narrative, whether written or oral, is a feature of human nature that crosses time and culture. "Far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing
experience with meaning, narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which trans-cultural messages about the shared reality can be transmitted... The absence of narrative capacity or a refusal of narrative indicates an absence or refusal of meaning itself (White, as quoted in Fisher, 1897, p. 65). Not only does the narrative rationality offer an account and understanding of specific instances of human choice, it also provides a basis of critique.

One of the postulates of the narrative theory is that one of the modes of human decision making and communication is the production and practice of "good reasons." Fisher argues that traditionally, rhetorical theory allows us to reason about questions of fact and logic but not questions of value. The "logic of good reasons" provides a remedy to that void in theory. These "good reasons" vary in form among situations, genres, and the method of communication and are ruled by matters of things like history, biography, culture and character (Fisher, 1987). "'Good reasons' are elements that provide warrants for accepting and adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be rhetorical" (Fisher, 1987, p. 107). A warrant is that which "authorizes, sanctions or justifies belief, attitude or action" (Fisher, 1987, p. 107). In other words, "good reasons" are those things which provide authorization, sanction, or justification for accepting and adhering to the beliefs, attitudes or actions forwarded by the rhetoric.

The purpose of a logic of good reasons is to offer a scheme that can generate a sense of what is good as well as what is reasonable, to ensure that people are conscious of the values they adhere to and would promote in rhetorical
transactions, and to inform their consciousness without dictating what they should believe. (Fisher, 1987, p. 113, italics his)

There are five components in the logic that supports "good reasons". The first component simply involves the facts; the implicit and explicit values embedded in a message. The second component addresses relevance which asks "are the values appropriate to the nature of the decision that the message bears upon" (Fisher, 1987, p. 109)? Included in this must be concerns for those values that have been omitted, distorted, or in some way misrepresented. The third component deals with consequence or the effects of adhering to the values expressed in the rhetoric. This includes the effects on one's concept of oneself, one's behavior, and also one's relationships with others and on society as a whole, as well as to the process of the rhetorical transaction. The fourth component refers to the consistency of the rhetoric to one's life. Are the values displayed in the rhetoric "confirmed or validated in one's personal experience, in the lives or statements of others whom one admires and respects, and in a conception of the best audience that one can conceive" (Fisher, 1987, p. 109)? The fifth and final component in the logic of "good reasons" is that of the transcendent issue. This asks if the values that the message offers are those that, in the critic's opinion, constitute the ideal basis for human conduct. "A value is valuable not because it is tied to a reason or is expressed by a reasonable person per se, but because it makes a pragmatic difference in one's life and in one's community" (Fisher, 1987, p. 111, italics his).

To put this into practice and determine the relevance of a value expressed in The Little Flowers of St. Francis, we must not only know the facts that are expressed but also
the nature and function of the values. Some of the functions of values are to promote intelligence, encourage cooperative behavior, satisfy curiosity and seek the truth for its own sake, realize love, and free one to succeed, create and explore (Fisher, 1987). How a value operates in a specific case, such as in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, is dependent on time, location, topic and the culture that is manifest in the rhetoric. To utilize the tests of consistency, consequence, and transcendence, it is only necessary that one know oneself and those one esteems as experts or most capable to evaluate the specific instance.

“The final judgment of what to believe or do is thus made by inspection of ‘facts,’ values, self, and society; it is inevitably an intersubjective and pragmatic decision” (Fisher, 1987, p. 111). Since humans are valuing beings, value judgments are therefore inevitable. But humans are also reasoning beings and as such we must acknowledge that there will never be a consensus concerning values. As individuals, our values are formed by a number of influences including our ability to reason. Because of this individuality, it is very likely there will never be an analytically established hierarchy of values that will enjoy universal support.

Another postulate of the narrative theory concerns the rationality of the rhetoric. “Rationality is determined by the nature of people as narrative beings - their inherent awareness of narrative probability...and their constant habit of testing narrative fidelity” (Fisher, 1987). The narrative theory advances the notion that people are inherent storytellers who have a natural ability to recognize if a story is coherent, truthful and reliable. These are the essential components of the narrative logic that I will use in analyzing *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* - probability and fidelity. Probability is
concerned with the internal structure of the story and is assessed in three ways: (1) its argumentative or structural coherence, (2) material coherence and (3) characterological coherence. Structural coherence simply establishes if the story is structurally sound. Material coherence addresses the comparison and contrasting of the story to those in others discourses. Characterological coherence is a key concept where the critic investigates the characters of the story to see if they contribute to making the story believable. To look at this element, the critic interprets the character’s decisions and actions to see if they reflect the values portrayed. This is critical to the probability of the story because the characters must behave in a predictable manner. Without this predictability, the audience will attribute no trust, sense of community, and no rational human order to the story.

The characterological consideration of coherence is actually an inquiry into the motivation of the characters. The trust that is established becomes the foundation of belief. Characterological consideration is an important element to consider in the analysis of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* since we expect the members of the Franciscan community to behave in a manner that exemplifies their beliefs. The fidelity or truthfulness of the story pertains to whether the story applies to real life and is assessed by applying the aforementioned logic of “good reasons” - or the values - plus an evaluation of the facts presented to determine if the stories ring true to our own lives. It pertains to the individuated elements of the story and whether these elements represent an accurate assertion about what we believe to be our social reality. I will show in this
essay that the stories written in the thirteenth century text maintain narrative fidelity and ring true to real life for Christians of the twenty-first century.

The final concern of the narrative theory is that of the audience. The operative principle of narrative is to engage the audience in identification with the characters of the story. Chaim Perelman believed that the worth of arguments must be measured by the quality of the audience(s) that would adhere to them (Fisher, 1987). The narrative theory is designed to account for how people genuinely come to adopt the values in the stories by including the concept of audience identification. People come to adopt the stories and values because they identify with the actions and characters that portray those qualities which are considered the best or most civilized in human beings. Aristotle argued that “people have a natural tendency to prefer what they perceive as the true and the just” (Fisher, 1987, p. 67). If the audience has a tendency toward what they prefer, they can be induced to a response. Rhetoric is a function of inducement and to apply the narrative theory is to focus on the audience’s response to that inducement.

Through the revelations of characters and situations that represent different value orientations in conflict with each other . . . , the reader or auditor is induced to a felt-belief, a sense of the message that the work is advancing. [This felt-belief] is based on immediate, emotional, intuitive response to a representation of an enclosed fictive world. It is a response not based on deliberate thought or reasoned analysis. (Fisher, 1987, p.161)

I will consider if *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* incorporates the concept of identification within the text and address the value orientations the message is advancing.
The text of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is written to represent a specific culture of those who followed St. Francis. The narrative theory provides a useful perspective to get at the culture described in the stories. A text is viewed as composed of good reasons or elements that give justification for believing or conforming to the message forwarded in the text. This perspective focuses on the message of the text in which the values are taken as the principle ingredient of the message. Through employment of the narrative approach, I will uncover the values expressed by the text about a thirteenth century community which can influence a twenty-first Christian. Extricating the ultimate terms of a text can provide us with the tyrannizing image of the culture and could explain why the members are induced to adopt the values that the narrative approach uncovers. In this essay, I intend to analyze the text by extracting the ultimate terms to uncover the tyrannizing image the culture strives for as well as the values illustrated by the narratives. I will also discuss how that same image might be relevant to contemporary Christians who find themselves facing the problems of a strong secular influence. In terms of the narrative theory, I will apply the test of probability to see if the text is structurally sound as well as the test of fidelity to determine if the stories ring true to present real life Christians. I will also apply the test of coherence, consistency, and the transcendence issue as they relate to myself as the critic. Finally, since rhetoric serves as a method of inducement for the audience, I will evaluate the narratives in terms of actually including the element of identification within the text itself. The text should induce contemporary Christians to identify themselves with the people the author is portraying.
Chapter Three

A Critical Analysis

On the surface, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* might appear as if it would only be relevant to a Roman Catholic audience since the text is about a Catholic saint and his devout followers. Members of the Roman Catholic Church are believers in Jesus Christ and the text has many references to God, “Our Lord Jesus Christ” and the “Blessed Virgin.” But if a reader were to look only at these terms to make a judgment as to whether to continue reading or not, they would be missing an important message promoted by the text. Many people are influenced by St. Francis either directly or indirectly and much of this influence stems from what is passed on through this specific text. For example Mario Cuomo (1984) in his keynote speech to the Democratic National Convention may not have been aware that he was referencing a story from *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* when he alluded to St. Francis as the great mediator. It is the purpose of this analysis to look past the theological issues within the text to uncover a value system imbedded in the text that can be appreciated by Christians living in a secular culture as well as those living in a religious environment.

Before I move into the central analysis, there are a few structural issues that should be addressed. *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is not simply a single narrative by one author but a series of vignettes written during two time periods by two different authors. The first forty-one chapters are a variety of literary sketches that relate events in the lives of the friars and St. Francis that exemplify some of their virtues. The next twelve chapters, titled “Some Marvelous Stories of Certain Friars of the Province of the
Marches” (Brown, 1958, p. 137) are accounts of visions and dreams received by some of the Friars familiar to Brother Ugolino. These stories are reports of events that involved friars who were “exemplary Friars Minor who shone like stars above and below with radiant virtues, and who illumined the Order of St. Francis and the world by their example and teaching” (Brown, 1958, p. 137). They were friars who lived closer to the time period of the author than that of St. Francis. The final section, written by the unknown translator, contains many of the circumstances surrounding the imprinting of St. Francis with the Holy Stigmata. Together these short stories provide us with a combination of reports of actual events that occurred; some metaphors; a number of visions and several dreams.

An important component that Fisher (1987/1989) included in the test of probability concerned the structural coherence of the narrative. The two authors in two different time periods maintain structural coherence between the stories and the sections by using a consistent method of titling the chapters. Both authors created a title that was a short sketch describing what the chapter contained. Every title included either the word ‘how’ or ‘about’ as in “How St. Francis Miraculously . . .” (Brown, 1958, p. 96) or “About the Perfect . . .” (Brown, 1958, p. 42). Since the sketches don’t proceed in a chronological order, this consistency provides the audience with a sense of continuity and coherence by tying the vignettes together.

The Ultimate Terms of The Little Flowers of St. Francis

To gain insight to the culture of a specific community, it is important to discern the tyrannizing image that is at the center which the members endeavor to emulate.
Weaver (1953) acknowledged that it may be difficult to determine the central, driving image in communities that have no strong religious influence. It is a possibility that the lack of this image could be a primary reason for the lack of a strong sense of community. Since the community described in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is formed around a religious figure, it should have a recognizable and easily discernible tyrannizing image at its center.

**God terms**

The primary indicators that point toward the tyrannizing image of a culture are the “god terms” found in the rhetoric. These are the terms that have been given a supreme position in the rhetoric and possess some intelligible referents (Weaver, 1953). There are two terms in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* that hold this position, “divine” and “holy.” These terms can be considered “god terms” because they appear more frequently throughout the text than other words and each of them has a large variety of ancillary terms. Ancillary terms are subordinate terms that serve to aid or support the “god term.” Ancillary terms are also called referents because they are the concept or object that the “god term” is referring to. As I will demonstrate, the terms “divine” and “holy” are the “god terms” because they are the words that generate the force through the referents, or ancillary terms, and drive the members toward the tyrannizing image. While analyzing the text, it has become apparent that the ancillary terms in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* are significant because it is the ancillary terms that explain the culture of the community.
At first glance it would appear that the meanings of “holy” and “divine” should be obvious, considering this text is concerning a religious community. It may seem appropriate to apply the definition of “given or inspired by God” or “of or like God or a god” to the term divine. By the same token, we could say holy means “belonging to or coming from God” (Webster, 1988). These definitions would be warranted when speaking about a strictly religious community that has God at its center and the text does provide examples of the terms “divine” and “holy” used in this manner. But these terms do not gain their rhetorical power only by alluding to God; there is a broader meaning of the words. The term “divine” is also defined as that which is “supremely great or good” and “holy” as that which is “regarded with or deserving great respect, awe, reverence, or adoration” (Webster, 1988). It is in these contexts that many of the referents, or ancillary terms, begin to make sense. Evidence that these “god terms” are used in this broader manner will be provided throughout this chapter.

A close analysis of the text reveals that the most influential “god term” with the larger number of referents in The Little Flowers of St. Francis is the word “holy”. “Holy” is used as a modifier no less than one-hundred and five times and has at least sixty individual ancillary terms. Without the word “holy” attached, many of these ancillary terms would become just part of the narrative. Since “holy” is used to modify these terms, they take on a power and thereby become deserving of greater respect or reverence. When St. Francis gives St. Clare “holy advice” (Brown, 1958, p. 72), advice becomes more than mere counsel but counsel which deserves great respect. The teaching of St. Anthony becomes teaching that deserves awe or reverence when “holy” is used to modify
the word (Brown, 1958, p. 131). And finally when Brother Leo went to visit St. Francis with a “holy intention” (Brown, 1958, p. 186), his intention was with great respect and adoration because it was “holy.” If these terms did not have the modifier “holy” attached, they would take on a different meaning. “Holy” becomes a “god term” because of the force it generates through the terms it is attached to. All other expressions, with the exception of “divine,” are ranked subordinate to the power generated by “holy” because they provide less force in comparison to that of “holy” (Weaver, 1953).

Many of the ancillary terms that are enhanced by the power of the word “holy” are important parts of the narrative but some of the ancillary terms that “holy” modifies show themselves to be primary indicators of the culture. These terms are significant because they provide a picture of the values that were important to the community of Franciscans. One of the most prevalent and dominant terms to be connected to “holy” is the word poverty. The term poverty is used in the narratives without “holy” attached to it but it has less rhetorical power than “holy poverty” (Brown, 1958, p. 69) which is poverty to be reverenced or respected.

The poverty adopted by the friars in the Franciscan community is not the same poverty experienced in the twenty-first century. The poverty of these past friars was what is generally known today as voluntary simplicity. This voluntary aspect is evident from the beginning of the text when we read about the first follower of Francis, Lord Bernard, who upon his conversion, “immediately went and brought out all his possessions and sold all that he owned - and he was very rich. And with great joy he distributed it all to the poor” (Brown, 1958, p. 44). Francis cherished poverty as the
basic element required for evangelical perfection and believed it to be the basis of all other virtues (Feldner, 1925/1982).

St. Francis told one member of the community, Brother Masseo, that “the treasure of blessed poverty is so very precious and divine that we are not worthy to possess it in our vile bodies. For poverty is that heavenly virtue by which every obstacle is removed from the soul so that it may freely enter into union with the eternal Lord God” (Brown, 1958, p. 69). This statement provides a good reason for desiring poverty since St. Francis calls it a “treasure” which will provide a method of removing every obstacle in the soul that stands in the way of complete union with God. Union with God was the goal of every member of the Franciscan community. This desire for poverty and union with God is consistent with many of the religious orders in a variety of faiths of the modern world. The problem that arises with the notion of poverty is in respect to its fidelity to the Christians of the twenty-first century. The world, as we know it from our own experiences, promotes a “more is better” ideal which would be inconsistent with the value of poverty. This ideal affects the Christian as well as the secular society. But if we refer back to many of the contemporary authors referenced in the beginning of this essay, poverty or voluntary simplicity is an ideal that can provide a method of reconnection to one’s inner spiritual being. For the practicing Christian, this spiritual being is God.

Further along the same passage, we find that St. Francis provides more good reasons to “possess the infinite treasure of holy poverty” (Brown, 1958, p. 69). He tells Brother Masseo that “poverty is that heavenly virtue by which all earthly and transitory things are trodden under foot . . . which makes the soul, while still here on earth, converse
with the angels in Heaven . . . she gives to souls who love her the ability to fly to Heaven, and she alone guards the armor of true humility and charity” (Brown, 1958, p. 69). St. Francis appears to be saying that earthly things are transitory and therefore passing. The desire for poverty makes these earthly, transitory things less appealing in comparison to conversing with angels or flying to Heaven.

St. Francis’s love for “holy” poverty is consistent with the manner in which he lived his life and expected his friars to live also. Luke 12:34 reads “Wherever your treasure lies, there your heart will be.” The lives the friars lived exemplified this belief and the poverty that is portrayed in The Little Flowers of St. Francis is consistent throughout the text. The friars owned nothing more than the habits they wore. This theme is carried through the entire text and into The Considerations of The Holy Stigmata where Francis stressed to his friars the importance of the observance of holy poverty. He admonished them that they could

be sure that the more we despise poverty, the more will the world despise us and the greater need will we suffer. But if we embraced holy poverty very closely, the world will come to us and will feed us abundantly . . . He has made this contract between us and the world: that we give the world a good example and that the world provide us with what we need. So let us persevere in holy poverty, because it is the way of perfection and the pledge and guarantee of everlasting riches. (Brown, 1958, p. 179)

St. Francis is saying in this passage that if the friars were to reject and despise poverty and strive for the things the world deems valuable, then they wouldn’t be much different
than those who have created that standard. People in both the thirteenth and twenty-first centuries struggle to obtain the things they want and need. They have a hard time giving up the things they believe they deserve. If those who lived in a religious community despised poverty for themselves but in turn asked those in the world to give up the things they have acquired, St. Francis says the world will despise those in community. But if those in community embraced holy poverty for themselves, the people of the world would admire them. The way to set an example is to embrace poverty and the world will follow. This can also be true of Christians of the twenty-first century.

The reader can appreciate, by the fidelity of the narratives, that the values imbedded in the preaching of St. Francis are not merely empty words. The poverty he espouses is lived out in the everyday lives of the friars. It is written of Brother Pellegrino that he “really was a pilgrim” (Brown, 1958, p. 108) who did not “find peace in any creature or attach his affections to any temporal thing” (Brown, 1958, p. 108) and in doing so “he climbed from virtue to virtue” (Brown, 1958, p. 109). His companion, Brother Riccieri, lived a life of “sanctity and humility, traveling on foot, and devoutly and faithfully serving his neighbors” (Brown, 1958, p. 109). When the friars are gathered at the first general chapter, “they slept on the bare ground or on some straw, and their pillows were stones or pieces of wood” (Brown, 1958, p. 80).

The stories do not present a one-sided view of the observance of poverty. Not all of the brothers who enter the order were able to embrace the required poverty with ease. One of the stories describes how a new member of the Order, “a delicate young man” (Brown, 1958, p. 86), began to hate wearing the habit and “as his dislike for the Order
increased, he firmly resolved to throw the habit away and return to the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 86). The honesty of the author in this matter makes this story believable because he expresses a human sentiment that many people can relate to: That choosing a life of poverty, or voluntary simplicity, is not an easy option especially when it goes against what society teaches or what we learned while we were growing up. This specific struggle is resolved through a vision that helps the young man understand the consequences and value of remaining with the Order. The vision depicted what the man would gain in the next world if he adhered to the values that were set forth by the Order. This account has rationality written into the story because the man recognized the coherence and fidelity of the vision to what he knows about the Order. It is also rational for the reader because, although they may not have experienced this kind of vision, they can comprehend why the man would choose to remain faithful to the difficult values of the Order. It would appear reasonable to the reader that the young man would choose to delay his gratification if the reward was great enough. Under the circumstances, if we apply the characterological consideration of coherence, the young man made the most sensible choice based on what was shown to him in the vision and also on how the other members of the community lived their lives.

The story provided a good reason for the young man to choose poverty when confronted with the choice but will Christians living in the secular modern world consider it a good reason? I live in the modern world and am constantly bombarded with the things that others consider important or attractive and, based on experience, I don’t consider myself unusual. This choice of delayed gratification makes sense to me as the critic
because I am a vowed Franciscan. I can relate to the young man’s desire for the “glory and joy of Paradise” (Brown, 1958, p. 87) as opposed to the transient riches of this world. Faced with the question about appealing to the non-vowed Christians of our society, I would have to say that the allure of contemporary Christians to this and other idealistic stories in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* resides in assuming the best in people and believing these stories stimulate it. This particular story depends on a belief in the afterlife which many Christians profess to have faith in. It is this desire for the afterlife that prompts acceptance but it is also human nature to seek to see oneself, and to be seen by others, in the best possible light. In this case one may wish to be seen as unattached to material goods while, at the same time, remain attached to material goods.

A second ancillary term frequently connected with the god term “holy” and that describes a value important the community is obedience. This is an obedience that is regarded with great respect since obedience is a cornerstone of the Franciscan community. Obedience is so important that it is addressed in the first chapter of The Rule of 1223. The Rule of 1223 was written by St. Francis and contained a list of things that he considered necessary for a proper norm of living within a community. The first chapter reads

> The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without property, and in chastity. Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to his holiness Pope Honorius and his lawfully elected successors and to the Church of Rome. The
other friars are bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors. (St. Francis, 1223)

This passage states that to be a Friar Minor, one had to be obedient to the pope and the superiors in the community. In *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* there are many examples of friars performing duties and actions out of obedience.

Within the text we find St. Francis telling Brother Bernard "'under holy obedience I order you to do whatever I command'" (Brown, 1958, p. 47) but also Brother Bernard’s response "when Brother Bernard heard this, it was hard for him to do. However, because of holy obedience, he performed as courteously as he could what St. Francis has commanded him to do" (Brown, 1958, p. 47). In this instance, what St. Francis was telling Brother Bernard to do was to help instill humility into St. Francis by having Bernard chastise Francis for infractions even though Bernard did not want to do it. Francis realized that he himself needed to be punished for his "presumption and insolence of heart" (Brown, 1958, p. 47) and that Bernard was the only one to provide the penalty. Bernard respected Francis and found it hard to chasten him. St. Francis was not trying to be a tyrant or masochistic; he was trying to teach Bernard the importance of being obedient. Obedience was not something to be held over the heads of the friars but a method to maintain order and help the friars gain holiness.

Good reasons for holy obedience can be found in passages throughout the text. In chapter 36 one of the friars, Brother Leo, had a vision about many friars trying to cross a swiftly moving river. A number of the friars who were burdened with large loads on their backs got sucked up in the current and were swept downstream. The friars with smaller
loads on their backs had to struggle against the current to get across but those with little or no loads made it across the stream safely. When Brother Leo asked St. Francis what this vision meant, St. Francis replied that the ones with heavy burdens were those friars concerned about daily living. The ones who made it across the stream safely were the ones who “joyfully and willingly they embrace, take up, and carry everyday the... yoke of His very holy obedience. And consequently they pass easily and without danger - indeed with joy - from this world” (Brown, 1958, p. 125). As with poverty, the good reason for the friars to accept obedience, is delaying gratification in this world for something better in the next. Let me provide one more example of a portion of text that contains a good reason to embrace obedience.

St. Francis had a vision just prior to the time he was imprinted with the stigmata in which he saw Christ. Christ asked St. Francis to offer Him whatever St. Francis found in the folds of his habit. St. Francis pulled out three large gold coins and offered them to Christ. After St. Francis offered the third coin, he “was immediately made to understand that those three offerings symbolized the holy golden obedience, the very great poverty, and the very radiant chastity” (Brown, 1958, p. 189). The portrayal of obedience as “holy” and “golden” shows that St. Francis believed obedience was a treasure worthy of seeking. The fact that St. Francis discovers that obedience is valuable provides the good reason for the followers of St. Francis to desire the grace of obedience. Again, as a Franciscan this makes sense to me and these excerpts provide warrants for accepting and adhering to the advice fostered. But even if it is reasonable to me, I must consider if the
advice is reasonable for contemporary Christians living in a society influenced by secularism.

Obedience to any authority is not openly and actively encouraged in many arenas of contemporary society even for Christians. We see commercials that encourage us to set our own rules and do our own thing but the reality is that we, as citizens of our society, must obey many rules and regulations. Not only does the fifth commandment state “thou shall not kill” but the laws put forth by our judicial system make it a punishable offense. “Thou shall not steal” is another commandment that our judicial system upholds as an offense punishable by our courts. We are encouraged to uphold these and other laws of our society by threat of punishment if we disobey. The obedience promoted by St. Francis in his Rule and in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is an obedience based on gaining something of value if adhered to. There is no overt threat of punishment found within the text if one is not in obedience, just the promise of a reward; in this case an eternal reward.

Christians living in modern society can benefit from learning about the obedience portrayed in the text because they are provided with examples of how obedience is embraced for a positive reward and not primarily to avoid punishment. The text does not provide examples of brothers being obedient under the threat of damnation but because of the promise of life in the hereafter. Contemporary Christians are similar to the characters in the text in that they have choice whether or not they want to be part of a community. After they join they are then obligated to follow the rules; many of the friars depicted within the narratives do obey their superiors.
One example of this obedience is found when Brother James, a member of a Franciscan community the Province of the Marches, was summoned by his superior, Brother Matthew, who “ordered him under obedience to tell him what he had seen” (Brown, 1958, p. 152) while rapt in ecstasy for three days. Brother James “revealed [the vision] under obedience” (Brown, 1958, p. 152) to Brother Matthew. Another example is found in “The Fifth Consideration on the Holy Stigmata” when

Brother Philip, Minister of Tuscany, commanded Brother Matthew of Castiglione Aventino, a man of great devotion and saintliness, to tell him under holy obedience what he knew about the day and hour when the sacred Stigmata were imprinted by Christ on the body of St. Francis, because he had heard that Brother Matthew had had a revelation about it. This Brother Matthew, under the obligation of holy obedience, answered him. (Brown, 1958, p. 207)

Here we see that Brother Matthew considered obedience an obligation even though the subject he was obligated to talk about was difficult. There is characterological coherence throughout the text because the friars took a vow of obedience when they joined the community and did their best to live out that vow. When one member of the community, Brother Leo, did something he was ordered not to do, he “knelt down before St. Francis and confessed the sin of disobedience which he had committed against the order, and with many tears he begged St. Francis to forgive him” (Brown, 1958, p. 188). This passage shows that the friars had human frailties by portraying them as capable of disobedience but also that they had compunction for their sin which maintains the characterological
coherence of the story. The friars act as we expect them to by attempting to obey but also by repenting when they disobey.

There are other ancillary terms found connected to the god term “holy” that explain the values of the community but they are not used as frequently as poverty and obedience. Humility is one of these lesser employed ancillary terms. Webster (1988) defines humility as the “absence of pride or self-assertion” and we turn again to the Rule of 1223 to examine the importance of humility to the order. St. Francis (1223) writes in chapter six “as strangers and pilgrims in this world, who serve God in poverty and humility, they should beg alms trustingly” (p. 61). Feldner (1925/1982) explains that humility for the Franciscan was “the poverty of spirit, the love of being small” and that humility was especially important for those in leadership (p. 166).

When we turn to The Little Flowers of St. Francis, we see not only St. Francis exhibiting humility, “as the holy humility that was in him did not allow him to trust himself or in his own prayers, he humbly turned to others” (Brown, 1958, p. 74), but the narratives about the other friars provide evidence of them displaying humility as well. One story titled “How St. Francis Tested Brother Masseo’s Humility” (Brown, 1958, p. 66), explains how St. Francis gave Brother Masseo an order to be of service to the other brothers in the hermitage. He was to cook all of their meals, hand out alms to those who came to the gate and be the gatekeeper. Consequently, the whole burden of taking care of the place was on him and he complied out of obedience and humility. This made the other brothers very uncomfortable because they perceived him to be a “man of great perfection” (Brown, 1958, p. 66) so they asked St. Francis to let them help Brother
Masseo with the duties of the place. The charity of the Brothers moved St. Francis to preach “a wonderful sermon on holy humility, teaching them that the greater the gifts and graces which God gives us, the greater is our obligation to be more humble, because without humility no virtue is acceptable to God” (Brown, 1958, p. 67). Humility is an important trait for this particular community because they were called to be of service to others and this could be difficult without an absence of pride.

The following passage provides us with a good reason for striving for the holy humility found in the text.

When Brother Masseo heard these marvelous things about humility and realized that it was the treasure of salvation and eternal life, he began to be inflamed with such love and desire for that virtue of humility, which was most worthy of divine favor, that, looking up toward Heaven, with great fervor he made a vow and a very powerful resolve never to consent to rejoice in this world until he should feel that most excellent humility perfectly present in his soul. (Brown, 1958, p. 119)

We have seen previously that both poverty and obedience have been presented in the text as treasures worthy of pursuit. The fact that they are treasures becomes the good reason for us to accept the advice put forth in the text about poverty and obedience. In this previous passage, humility becomes the treasure worth seeking. Once again, trying to acquire a treasure is the warrant for adhering to the counsel advanced by the text.

The second “god term” found The Little Flowers of St. Francis is the word “divine”. The word divine is used almost as frequently as the word holy and modifies
nearly as many ancillary terms. "Divine" is used within the text in the obvious sense where something is given or inspired by God as found when connected with the word providence. "By Divine Providence and the abundant supply of all good things" (Brown, 1958, p. 82) is an example of divine denoting something given by God especially when the words "Divine" and "Providence" are capitalized. When one speaks of a divine revelation as found in the following passage, "by divine revelation he saw the whole Place surrounded and besieged by devils" (Brown, 1958, p. 92), the revelation can be presumed to have been given by God simply by the description of the revelation. This is not the only definition we can attribute to the term "divine" within The Little Flowers of St. Francis. Many of the ancillary terms connected with the god term "divine" also make sense if we use the alternate definition of supremely great or good. For Christians, though, either definition can be persuasive and provide a good reason to embrace the lessons supplied by the text.

One example of an ancillary term connected to and receiving power from the god term "divine" is "wisdom." As with the term "divine", there are passages within the text in which it is obvious that the wisdom is given or inspired by God. An example of this is when Brother Masseo "understood with certainty that the Spirit of divine wisdom and grace guided St. Francis in all his actions" (Brown, 1958, p. 66). These passages are important and as rhetorically powerful as the excerpts where the wisdom referred to can be comprehend as being supremely great or good. Another instance where "divine" can be understood to be inspired by God is provided in a passage where St. Francis preached and "his heavenly words seemed like sharp arrows which were shot from the bow of
divine wisdom and pierced the hearts of everyone” (Brown, 1958, p. 107). In this passage St. Francis spoke with such great knowledge and understanding that what he said went right to the heart of the listeners. Christians living in the twenty-first century may find this notion comfortable to relate to when we think of how often we have listened to a person convey some message that touches our very core. It is also possible to view this passage just as persuasive if the alternate definition were employed, though. Wisdom that is supremely great or good can go straight to the heart as well.

Wisdom was so important to St. Francis that he called it “Queen Wisdom” and asked that God save her and her sister holy simplicity (Celano, 1228, p. 513). The wisdom which St. Francis was speaking of was that wisdom that is supremely great or good and he admonishes the brothers “let us not be wise and prudent according to the flesh, but let us rather be simple, humble, and pure” (Feldner, 1925/1982, p. 205). In other words, don’t be wise in the ways the world admires but keep the values of the Order firmly in place.

In another chapter, the King of France came to meet with Brother Giles. While he was there neither Brother Giles nor the King spoke a word. When questioned about this

Brother Giles answered: “Dear Brothers, do not be surprised that neither he nor I was able to say anything to each other, because in the moment when we embraced, the light of divine wisdom revealed his heart to me and mine to him. And so by God’s grace we looked into each other’s hearts, and whatever he thought of saying to me or I to him, we heard without sound made by lips and
tongue even better than if we had spoken with our lips - and with greater consolation. For if we had wanted to explain with the help of our voices what we felt in our hearts, because of the defect of human language, which cannot clearly express the secret mysteries of God except by mystic symbols, that conversation would have saddened rather than consoled us. (Brown, 1958, p. 123)

This passage calls to mind the difficulties encountered when one tries to tell a loved one how much they mean to them. Words often fail to express the true emotions between humans and often times the words can become stumbling blocks. This same dilemma can be imagined when trying to express great consolation to a friend who has just experienced an unimaginable sorrow. Trying to find the correct words can frequently be a frustration while physical contact may be the only means to convey the true feelings of the people. This is where the great understanding or divine wisdom bridges the gap between two people and becomes a virtue. For Christians, this great understanding that bridges the gap can both be inspired by God as well as something that is supremely good.

Another important ancillary term connected with “divine” is the word “love.” Love is a significant concept for humans living during any time period. The text connects the term “love” with “divine” only a few times but the stories bear out this love in many actions of the Brothers. One place where the two terms are connected is found in the chapter titled “How St. Clare Ate a Meal With St. Francis and His Friars “ (Brown, 1958, p. 72). This story explains that while during a meal, all the companions were “rapt in God by the overabundance of divine grace that descended upon them” (Brown, 1958, p. 73). During this rapture, the place where they were gathered appeared to be on fire and
the local townspeople ran to put it out. When the townspeople reached the place they found it was not on fire so they entered the building. Instead of flames they found the companions

sitting around that very humble table, rapt in God by contemplation and invested with power from on high. Then they knew for sure that it had been a heavenly and not a material fire that God had miraculously shown them to symbolize the fire of divine love which was burning in the souls of those holy friars and nuns. (Brown, 1958, p. 73)

The divine love expressed in this passage is represented by fire and could be interpreted as love inspired by God, because they were “rapt in God” (Brown, 1958, p. 73) but can also be a supremely good love that one has for another. Great love has often been likened to a fire in prose, poetry and song. We read in popular romance novels that someone was “burning with love” or hear a song that claims “something’s burning and I think it’s love.” Since the love that is portrayed in this passage is referred to as “divine love”, it is not a human love that can be misconstrued as lust. According to Webster (1988) “divine love” is one definition of agape - a great, spontaneous, altruistic love. Evidence of this altruistic love, or agape, is found throughout the text. It is especially evident in the passages where the Brothers show unselfish concern for others in the corporal works of mercy they perform.

One way the Brothers showed supremely great love was to minister to those sick with leprosy. “In a Place near the one St. Francis was then living, the friars were taking care of leprosy patients and sick people in a hospital” (Brown, 1958, p. 97). This was a
difficult and selfless task particularly since leprosy was thought to be easily transmitted and being stricken with it carried an enormous stigma. "St. Francis ... used to serve victims of leprosy with very great affection, giving them food, washing their sore limbs, cleaning and washing their clothes, and, moreover, frequently and fervently giving them kisses" (Brown, 1958, p. 96). Leprosy victims were a particularly troublesome ministry for Francis because he grew up with a loathing for lepers that he didn’t overcome until his conversion (Feldner, 1925/1982). This form of selflessness was not entirely without blessings for the Brothers, though, and some blessings came in the form of seeing a few of the patients healed. Chapter twenty-five tells of one particularly difficult patient who was ministered to in body, for his leprosy, and in his soul. "And as externally the water washed his body and the flesh began to heal and be wholly cleansed from leprosy, so too interiorly his soul began to be healed and cleansed" (Brown, 1958, p. 98). The great healing power of love is currently being considered for scientific investigation but anecdotal evidence has demonstrated that love is a powerful medicine. Babies who are not shown love fail to thrive and adults in loving relationships heal more quickly and live longer than those who do not give or receive love.

Additional evidence that this love is not mere human love but an unselfish, altruistic love comes in the Brothers works of charity. Another word that can be interchanged with love is the word charity. In Christian theology, charity is the love of God for man or of man for his fellow man (Webster, 1988). It also can be an act of good will or affection. There was only one instance where charity is coupled with the god term "divine" but acts of charity are consistently found throughout the narratives. Brother
Bernard's first act after his conversion was to sell "all that he owned - and he was very rich. And with great joy he distributed it all to the poor" (Brown, 1958, p. 44). Charity can only come with a willingness to set aside self and share with others. Another act of charity is explained in the story about three robbers who came to a "Place of the friars" (Brown, 1958, p. 100) and asked for something to eat. The guardian of the place scolded them severely and sent them away hungry. When Francis heard about this, he chastised the guardian saying "you acted against charity" (Brown, 1958, p. 101) and told him to take the only food they had, find the robbers, and ask for their forgiveness. The guardian obediently did as he was instructed and so moved the robbers that they repented of the wrongs they had done and converted to the way of Francis.

Two final important ancillary terms which are intertwined in meaning but found less frequently in the text than other ancillary terms are the word "chastity" and "purity." The concept of "chastity" depicts a significant value in the culture exposed in The Little Flowers of St. Francis and has been linked with poverty and obedience in several passages cited in this thesis. An additional passage which includes and further endorses all three values talks about the "glorious radiance which... was given by God for the humble penance and holy poverty and obedience and pure chastity which [was] observed to the end with joyful minds" (Brown, 1958, p. 87). According to the first chapter of Rule of St. Francis written in 1223, quoted earlier in this chapter, chastity is a notable tenet considered necessary for the members of the community. According to Webster (1988), chastity can be defined either as celibacy, or sexual abstinence; or purity, decency or
modesty in nature or behavior. “Purity” is defined as freedom from evil or sin, innocence or chastity. The way the words are used in the text is not necessarily obvious.

The text makes it explicit that the Brothers lived lives separated from women. We know from reading the text that none of the Brothers were married and the Sisters were secluded and lived apart from men. Feldner (1925/1982) reveals that St. Francis “observed the greatest caution and reserve in his dealings with the opposite sex” (p. 209). St. Francis also encouraged his Friars to avoid interacting with women as much as possible because of the temptations that can arise by associating with the opposite sex. Francis viewed chastity as the fragrant blossom on the tree of humility whose main branches were simplicity and obedience (Feldner, 1925/1982). With this in mind it appears it might be obvious that when referring to chastity, sexual abstinence would be the preferred interpretation. In some passages “chastity” is paired with “purity” which might indicate that celibacy is truly the meaning of chastity as in the excerpt where St. Francis is encouraging his followers to “maintain an angelic purity and chastity” (Brown, 1958, p. 81). In this passage purity, especially “angelic” purity, can suggest freedom from sin or evil but more likely would mean sexually innocent. I submit that this is not the only interpretation nor the most rhetorically powerful interpretation of the word “chastity” found within The Little Flowers of St. Francis.

When examining the passages containing references to chastity or purity, the authors use the words in a manner which can be open to interpretation. When a nobleman converted to Francis’s way of life and “lived all the rest of his life in great penance and sanctity and purity” (Brown, 1958, p. 128), it can construed to mean that he lived
sexually abstinent for the remainder of his life. Alternately, it can be understood to mean that the nobleman lived free from corrupting elements and sin until he died. Either interpretation upholds the values of the community and both are equally important when trying to describe the culture exposed in the text.

When St. Francis chose Brother Leo as a traveling companion because he was a "man of the greatest simplicity and purity" (Brown, 1958, p. 174), it is not clear from the text whether Brother Leo was chosen because he was celibate or simply decent and modest. Either interpretation can be applied and either interpretation might be appropriate in this passage. Many contemporary Christians who would be influenced by the values in this text are married. Chastity understood as sexual abstinence would not be accepted nor even appropriate in the case of married Christians. The rhetorical influence of the concept of "chastity" for contemporary Christians would be more acceptable, as well as appropriate, if it were to be interpreted to be modest, decent or free from evil or sin. Modesty is one of the characteristics Covey (1989) includes as important in the Character Ethic. Chastity can be understood to mean modesty within the text.

If we were to take a second look at a passage quoted earlier in this thesis which contain a reference to chastity, it would be difficult to ascertain for certain that sexually abistent would be the appropriate message. St. Francis states that he was "immediately made to understand that those three offerings symbolized the holy golden obedience, the very great poverty, and the very radiant chastity which by His grace God has granted me" (Brown, 1958, p. 189). In analyzing this passage it is not clear that St. Francis is referring to sexual abstinence when he talks about chastity. He could be saying that modesty or
freedom from evil or sin could be the treasure worth attaining. For contemporary Christians to be persuaded that chastity is an important value, one worth striving for, it is necessary to understand the meaning of chastity to be more broad than simply sexually innocent.

**Devil terms**

The second type of term Weaver (1953) identified as having the ability to drive a culture toward the “tyrannizing image” is the “devil term.” Contrary to god terms which draw the members of the culture and seduce them towards the tyrannizing image by attraction, the “devil terms” repel the members away from themselves and therefore towards the image. The “devil terms” of a piece of rhetoric defy any real analysis in that it is hard to “explain how they generate their peculiar force of repudiation” but they are recognized as “publicly-agreed-upon devil terms” (Weaver, 1953, p. 223). That is to say, it is difficult for the critic to explain why the devil term acts as an opposing force but a survey of the text reveals them to be “prime repellents” (Weaver, 1953, p. 222). Simply because the devil terms drive the members of a culture toward the tyrannizing image, though, it does not mean that they are a direct indicator of what the culture values. In the case of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* the primary devil term communicates the values indirectly by revealing what the community moves away from.

An intense examination of the text exposes only one term that acts as a force of repudiation for the members of the community of St. Francis followers. The members of the community are exhorted to “despise all the things of this world” (Brown, 1958, p. 41)
as St. Francis himself “renounced the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 42) and had “utter contempt for the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 42). The term “the world” or “this world” acts as a devil term to push the members towards the tyrannizing image in The Little Flowers of St. Francis. The “world” is never defined or identified in a concrete way in the text nor is there a place the members go that is away from the world. In this sense, the “world” is more of a metaphysical concept than a concrete, identifiable location. St. Francis constantly warned the brothers against the spirit and wisdom of the world which primarily looks for the appearance of truth rather than the actual truth, approves of affectation and pretense more than sincerity and glorifies exterior ostentation more than inner perfection (Feldner, 1925/1982).

One of the problems of recognizing that the members try to move away from the “world” is the knowledge that St. Francis loved the natural world that God created as well as the people who inhabited it. Francis considered all of his fellow inhabitants of the world as kin and members of “one, great family of God” (Feldner, 1925/1982, p. 414). He saw the goodness of God reflected in every creature and therefore was devoted to them with a special and heartfelt love. The Little Flowers of St. Francis has many examples of the love St. Francis had for men and beast alike. In one of the chapters we learn how St. Francis sought to release some doves that were snared by a boy intent on selling them at market. It is written that when St. Francis, “who was always very kind and wonderfully compassionate, especially toward gentle animals and little birds” (Brown, 1958, p. 91), saw the doves he was moved to pity for them. He asked the boy to give them to him and then built a nest for them.
St. Francis had as great of care and concern for men as he did for animals. One of the ways he and his friars served their fellow man was to take care of victims of leprosy. Another was to give alms to the poor and to beg for food for those who were the less fortunate of society. St. Francis was known to give the cloak off his back to someone who had need of it (Feldner, 1925/1982). He also sent the brothers out to preach for the salvation of souls as well as take care of the physical needs of the inhabitants of the world. St. Francis most definitely did not despise the natural world nor anything that lived in it. And though Francis did not despise the natural world, he wrote in his Rule that “all his friars should serve the Lord in this world as pilgrims and strangers” (Brown, 1958, p. 96). This is repeated in The Little Flowers of St. Francis when the author wrote that the friars went through the “world as pilgrims and strangers” (Brown, 1958, p. 52). This statement would indicate that they don’t feel a part of the world. Pilgrims are people who are just passing through, wanderers; strangers are outsiders or foreigners.

With all of this obvious love for natural world and the inhabitants of it, it is difficult to explain what is meant when St. Francis and his follower, Brother Rufino, showed by their good example how “the world is to be despised” (Brown, 1958, p. 117). And why would St. Francis’s “unshakable conviction of his faith and because of his contempt of the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 94) move a Muslim Sultan to feel great devotion to St. Francis? St. Francis’s contempt appears to be for the man-made, secular, material world and not the natural world that God created. St. Francis preached this contempt to his followers as well. At the first General Chapter, or complete gathering of followers, St. Francis “consoled and encouraged all the friars . . . to the contempt of the
world” (Brown, 1958, p. 81) while remaining in peace and harmony with all men. A possible explanation of the differences between the two worlds can be found in a text written by Fulton J. Sheen (1980). He states that the misunderstanding of the word “world” can be cleared up if one understands that there is a “very clear distinction between the world as the cosmos which God made and which is good, and the world as a spirit which is inimical to the Church and which is guided by the primacy of the world and the flesh and the devil” (p. 290). In other words, the cosmos, or the created world of God, is good while the world, which is a spirit in opposition to the Church, is to be avoided.

The text maintains characterological coherence by portraying those who follow Francis as having the same disdain for the material world. In one chapter Clare, his first female follower, “gave up the riches and pomp of the world as a result of [Francis’s] preaching” (Brown, 1958, p. 72). Another narrative tells how three men who terrorized the countryside with their robbing and looting were changed after listening to St. Francis and as a result “renounced the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 102). St. Francis then “received them into the Order, and they remained faithful to him in mind and deed” (Brown, 1958, p. 102). One of the earliest chapters of the text tells how St. Francis’s first follower, Brother Bernard, told Francis that he had “definitely resolved in [his] heart to leave the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 43) and follow Francis. Brother Bernard gave up all of his wealth to become a disciple of Francis and at the time of his death proclaimed that “not for a thousand worlds equal to this one would I want not to have served Our Lord Jesus Christ” (Brown, 1958, p. 56). Bernard was saying that he was glad of his decision to give
up things of the world and would not have traded his life for one thousand of the worlds he was about to leave behind.

Another example of the characters of the text acting as we would expect a Franciscan to act is in the narrative about a nobleman who received Francis into his home. The nobleman said to Francis

Father, I offer you myself and my belongings. Whenever you need habits and cloaks or anything, buy it and I will pay for it. And know that I am ready to provide for all your needs, because the good Lord has given me an abundance of worldly property, and so for love of Him I willingly give to those who are poor and in need. (Brown, 1958, p. 126)

Later this generous nobleman, who was willing to provide anything that Francis needed, “was so touched at heart by God and inspired to scorn and leave the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 127) that he distributed all his property to the poor and became a Friar Minor. Another story is of a time when Francis was preaching to a group of men, women and students in the city of Bologna. Francis preached such a way that “his heavenly words seemed like sharp arrows which were shot from the bow of divine wisdom and pierced the hearts of everyone so effectively that by this sermon he converted a very great multitude” (Brown, 1958, p. 107). Among those converted were two students who came to St. Francis “saying that they had an intense desire to leave the world and receive the habit of his friars” (Brown, 1958, p. 108). Both of the students were accepted into the Order and remained members until they died.
The text does give us some insight to what is suggested when “the world” is referred to. By no means do we get the complete concept with these passages but merely a notion of what is pointed at. In the chapter where Brother Bernard was instructed to go to Bologna “in order that he might produce fruit for God” (Brown, 1958, p. 52), he went obediently and with a “greater desire to receive shame and insults for the love of Christ than the vain honors or respect or praise of the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 52). Here we see that the friars did not value the respect or praise of those who lived in society and so “the world” can refer to those honors that the friars consider empty. Another insight can be gained from a passage cited earlier in this essay where Clare, the first female Franciscan, “gave up the riches and pomp of the world as a result of [Francis’s] preaching” (Brown, 1958, p. 72). Since the community members took vows of poverty, pomp and riches can represent the prosperity they have turned their backs on when they fled the world. Another passage seems to attach the world with sin; St. Francis preaches “dear people, flee the world. Give up sin” (Brown, 1958, p. 116). This part of the passage implies that to leave the world would mean giving up sin. Webster (1988) defines sin as “an offense against God, religion, or good morals.” For modern day Christians, any one of these definitions would be appropriate.

This desire to give up any offense against the good morals that are accepted as a standard by contemporary Christians would be a good reason to adhere to the advice of the text. The values promoted by the Christian faith indicates that there are certain ways a person is to act in order to get along with the rest of the people in society. Many Christians believe that it would be to the benefit of everyone in the society if the
members adhered to those morals and gave up any desire to go against them. Adhering to the good morals of a society not only means obeying the legal laws but also acting in an upright manner. Truth is an important moral tenet in many societies. People would like to be truthful to those they interact with and by the same token expect others to be truthful to them. An offense against the good moral of truthfulness would lead to lack of trust not only with the original liar but also create an atmosphere of mistrust among others in the society as well. To comply with the advice in the text would encourage the reader to act in an upright manner and expect others to act that way as well.

There were many basic problems in the thirteenth century that are very similar to those in the twenty-first century. Wars were being fought, people were being killed, crimes were being committed, and people were finding that merely living life was difficult. St. Francis was one man who advocated getting back to the basics of the gospel and simply treating everyone with respect as a child of God. His way of life advocated removing oneself from the overwhelming pressures of the world without actually leaving the world. His counsel brought about significant change not only during his time but for centuries after. Following the advice forwarded in the text about “forgetting the world” (Brown, 1958, p. 85) can give those living in the twenty-first century the same peace found in Francis’s followers.

Another good reason to renounce the world that can be extracted from the text is found in some of St. Francis’s words to his followers. He tells them that “brief is the world’s pleasure, but the punishment that follows lasts forever” (Brown, 1958, p. 81). St. Francis is telling his followers that there are pleasures that can be derived from living
in the world but those pleasures are brief compared to the potential punishment for delighting in those pleasures. The pleasure St. Francis is expressing is not the benign enjoyment from eating good food or living in a nice house. St. Francis is referring to the enjoyment of having too much food and not sharing with the hungry; of having too many nice things while others live in abject poverty. It is apparent that St. Francis is preaching against overindulgence when he encourages the friars to “have temperence in prosperity” (Brown, 1958, p. 81). Evidence of this attitude is also found when St. Francis praises a wealthy nobleman because he is “so kind to his neighbor, so generous to the poor, and so cheerful and courteous to guests” (Brown, 1958, p. 126). St. Francis is saying that there is a punishment for taking pleasure in overindulgence and it is one that lasts forever. The idea of eternal punishment might possibly induce many Christians of the twenty-first century to change their lifestyles. “Western cultures have fostered the understanding that a state of continual mental distractions is the natural order of things” (Elgin, 1981, p. 147). A part of this mental distraction encourages the members of society to over-create, over-indulge and over-consume. To leave the world would entail leaving this “more is better” concept behind.

If one were to disbelieve the notion of eternal punishment as an incentive for “forgetting to world” (Brown, 1958, p. 85), we only need to understand the repercussions of buying into society’s idea of pleasure. Overindulgence in many things can lead to a lifetime of pain, frustration, unhappiness or even to death. This is why St. Francis validated for his brothers that they “neither love nor desire nor possess any carnal or earthly thing in this world, but ‘having food and sufficient clothing’ they are ‘content’”
Remaining detached from the things that distract the Christian in the world can lead to a greater peace and sense of connection with the natural world.

**The Tyrannizing Image of the Culture**

Throughout this analysis of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, I have referred to the tyrannizing of the culture. The tyrannizing image can be determined by extracting the ultimate terms of the rhetoric of the culture, in this case the community of the followers of St. Francis are both religious and lay people. The analysis revealed that there were two terms which could be considered "god terms." These terms drive the culture towards the tyrannizing image and their referents describe the culture of the members. The two terms determined by this analysis to be "god terms" were "holy" and "divine." Both of these terms were found frequently all through the text and had a number of referents as described earlier in this essay. They also set the standard for comparison for subordinate terms. The second ultimate term that acts as a force to propel the culture towards the tyrannizing image is the "devil term." This terms has the power of repulsion to drive the members away from itself towards the tyrannizing image. Analysis reveals that the "world" is the only term that has all of the qualities required to act as a "devil term."

The definitions of "holy" and "divine" point to the tyrannizing image of the community portrayed by the text. Both words are used extensively throughout the text in reference to God as well as having rhetorical power in their secondary meanings. This analysis has exposed other terms found within the text that serve to describe or modify some ancillary terms but these are subordinate to "holy" and "divine." Examples of these
terms are "heavenly" and "marvelous." Weaver (1953) states that the force of the god terms imparts to other terms "their lesser degree of force, and fixes the scale by which degrees of comparison are understood" (p. 212). With this reasoning, it is clear that it is not merely the number of times that the god term is present in the rhetoric but also the essence or the inspiration that the term transmits and consequently the force it imparts on the other terms. If "holy" and "divine" were not present in the text then other terms would become the god terms. One of these other terms might very well be "heavenly" since it is used as a modifier and can be considered rhetorically potent. One must consider the audience or critic, though. I find that although the word "heavenly" is present and might have essentially the same meaning as "divine" or "holy," it does not transmit the same degree of power as either of those two words. It is the presence of the more influential words "holy" and "divine" within the text that subordinates "heavenly" and reduces its rhetorical force.

"Marvelous" is another word that has less significance than the god terms "holy" and "divine." As with the word "heavenly," if "holy" and "divine" were not present in the text "marvelous" might become a more powerful word. The word "marvelous" does convey a certain sentiment and moves the reader to a felt belief but it is a less impacting term than "holy" and "divine." The term "marvelous" is in a position of less power than the term "divine" and so is subordinate to it on the scale of comparison. Subordinate words receive power from but also point to the god terms and consequently are also important in the "links of a chain that extends upward toward some ultimate source"
(Foss, et. Al., 1991, p. 75), the tyrannizing image. In the case of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, that tyrannizing image is God.

The ultimate terms of a culture either draw or propel members toward the tyrannizing image. The ultimate terms of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* draw or propel the members of its culture toward God. The text can serve to influence the audience toward God as well. The desire to act in accordance with the model put forth by the text is spurred on by the Christian's aspiration to be with God in the afterlife. By the same token, the impulsion away from all the man-made, secular, material aspects of the world will drive man toward the natural world of God. Since St. Francis is the leader of a religious community and an important figure in the Catholic Church, it comes as no surprise that the tyrannizing image of the culture is the image of God as held by the community. In the Christian faith, God is the infinite, all-powerful, all-knowing, Supreme Being who is honored and worshipped. Sometimes it might be difficult for the Christian to get their mind around God and so it becomes necessary to illustrate a method to live out Christianity.

Christianity traditionally has been a religion of extreme altruism. Altruism is the unselfish concern for the welfare of others where the general well-being of the society becomes the proper goal of an individual. St. Francis and his followers that are portrayed in the text of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* exhibit this altruism. They take care of lepers, feed the poor, give away their clothing, and share their faith with others. They give us a model of behavior that shows the importance of sharing and caring for others. They portray a way of living that implies that others are at least as important as
themselves and sometimes more important. The good of the community is what they strive for as opposed to their own betterment in this life.

If the members of contemporary culture were driving towards altruism they would have a greater concern for the welfare of the community than their own material success. Individualism would come second to the needs of the community as a whole as well as the needs of the other member who make up the community. The individualism that consists of preoccupation with self would be replaced by the desire to move towards a larger identity where loyalty, commitment and effective living are encourage and embraced. Shifting the focus from individual concerns to the concerns of the community could promote some of the personal virtues found in the Character Ethic. The virtues of commitment, caring, discipline, and transcendence beyond one’s self are some of the positive benefits that come from being involved in a community.

Having God as our tyrannizing image and the subsequent altruism, as found in The Little Flowers of St. Francis, present in a culture can also encourage the members to delay their own gratification and ultimately pursue long-term goals as opposed to grabbing all that is in front of them. Delaying one’s own gratification as well as striving for goals that take some time to attain, possibly a lifetime, implies and encourages certainty that there is a future. Certainty then leads to the individual’s ability to embrace the characteristics which can stop the corrosion of character described by Sennett (1998). Members of the culture can adopt and emulate those qualities and virtues which make up the Character Ethic and finally awaken their spiritual centers. The rebirth of our spirituality can help to eliminate the confusion caused with respect to the problems caused by over-consumption
and individualism. Altruism that stems from a belief in God can become a positive driving force for a community or culture in the twenty-first century. Fisher (1987/1989) would “place love as the highest virtue of motivation in life; love provides the ground of being and is the motive that should inform all others in human decision making and action” (p. 136). Altruism is love in its purest form and I agree with Fisher (1987/1989) in that it should be the basis of all human decisions.

Perelman makes the claim that “to educate someone is . . . to give him the desire to resemble a model” (Fisher, 1987, p. 125). *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is giving a model of human behavior which includes values. The impact and the willingness of the audience to adopt the rhetorical messages is bound to those values. Humans have a tendency to believe the best about themselves. When the narratives present values which appear positive and good, we are moved by a desire to emulate or adopt those values. God is already important to the contemporary Christian and so the impact of the text on us might also be rooted in our desire to be seen with our “best face forward.”

**Some Observations About the Narrative Aspect of the Text**

Probability and fidelity are important conditions within the narrative approach. Probability concerns the internal structure of the text and relies on structural, material and characterlogical coherence. Fidelity asks if the stories ring true to life. For a text that was written almost seven hundred years ago and has been translated twice, the internal structure of the stories remains intact. The stories are easy to read and trust because the
characters of the stories act in a manner that would be expected of the followers of St. Francis. Some examples of this were provided earlier in this essay.

One technique used to portray the importance of the main character is to consistently refer to him as Saint Francis throughout the entire text. St. Francis was canonized a saint one hundred to one hundred and fifty years before the two individual authors wrote about him therefore it makes sense that the authors refer to him as St. Francis and not simply as Francis. The very first sentence in the text gives some evidence why St. Francis became a leader with such a large following. "First it should be known that the glorious St. Francis was conformed to Christ in all the acts of his life" (Brown, 1958, p. 41). Here we see a broad statement that describes St. Francis as glorious; someone worthy of the admiration and honor bestowed upon them. The statement also makes the claim that St. Francis was conformed or similar to Christ, the model for many who want to emulate Christian qualities. Finally, it states that St. Francis was conformed to Christ is all the acts of his life not just some.

All through the text we are repeatedly exposed to some of those Christ-like qualities that St. Francis possessed. The author writes of "St. Francis' utter contempt for the world and great patience" (Brown, 1958, p. 42) as well as "St. Francis' holiness" (Brown, 1958, p. 42) and that "St. Francis was grounded in true humility" (Brown, 1958, p. 63) as evidence of some qualities. We also see all through the text that St. Francis was referred to as "compassionate Father," "holy Father," and "blessed Father Francis" as well as frequently being simply called "the Saint." These attributes of compassion, patience, holiness, humility and blessedness provides a good reason to believe that St.
Francis is worthy to be emulated. Webster (1988) says that a saint is not only a canonized person who has lived an extraordinarily holy life but also a holy person who is exceptionally meek, charitable, and patient as well as having other admirable qualities.

The evidence that St. Francis is a good example of a Christian leader can be found from the beginning of the writings. Although Francis’s only initial intention was to live a gospel life, we find that shortly after he renounced the world and started living a simple life he had an admirer and potential follower. Francis’s first disciple, Brother Bernard, "wisely began to think over St. Francis’ utter contempt for the world and his great patience when he was insulted" (Brown, 1958, p. 42) plus Bernard admired the serenity and peace that Francis exhibited. Because of all these traits, Bernard decided he wanted to live the same kind of life that Francis chose. Here is evidence of the characterological coherence important for the probability of the text which makes it believable.

We find more evidence of characterological coherence in the text when we learn that there are many men and women making the decision to follow the lifestyle of St. Francis. When the people joined the Order started by St. Francis they took the “habit of St. Francis” (Brown, 1958, p. 110). The word habit could ultimately have a dual meaning in that it is the actual garment worn by the followers of St. Francis but also can mean the tendency to behave in a certain way. The rhetorical strength of the phrase the “habit of St. Francis” lies not only in the fact that his followers put on a garment like his but they also behaved in a manner similar to St. Francis. If his followers want to emulate St. Francis and his behavior, it becomes easier for the Christians of the twenty-first century to desire to follow him as well.
We also see from the text that St. Francis is not only a charismatic leader of his own Order but of a group of lay people as well. One of Francis’s friars, Brother Masseo, asked Francis “why does all the world seem to be running after you, and everyone seems to want to see you and hear you and obey you? You are not a handsome man. You do not have great learning or wisdom. You are not a nobleman. So why is all the world running after you” (Brown, 1958, p. 62-63)? Although it is not clear who “all the world” represents, we can ascertain from the passage that there were a number of people wanting to see, hear and obey St. Francis. The charisma of St. Francis captured the peoples’ imagination and inspired allegiance and devotion.

A few passages from The Considerations on the Holy Stigmata further endorse St. Francis’s impact on the lay people. A peasant who was leading the donkey that St. Francis was riding admonished St. Francis to “try to be as good as everyone thinks you are, because many people have great faith in you. So I urge you: never let there be anything in you different from what they expect of you” (Brown, 1958, p. 176). This portion of the text is affirmed later when St. Francis was returning from the retreat where he was imprinted with the Stigmata. The author writes “when the people of the district heard that he was passing by, all of them - men and women, small and great - came out to see him and with devotion and desire tried to touch him and kiss his hands” (Brown, 1958, p. 195). Although he did not intend it, St. Francis inspired many people to put great faith in him to the point that they wanted to see and touch him. He became the definitive charismatic leader in his time but also inspired such a following that there are
literally over one and one half million men and women in the world serving their neighbors
in the various Franciscan religious and lay communities (Pazzelli, 1993).

St. Francis exhibited many characteristics, or virtues, that made him a charismatic
leader who propelled the members of the culture towards the tyrannizing image. The fact
that St. Francis emulated desirable virtues is a good reason for those in the twenty-first
century to look to him as a model of exemplary behavior. Stephen Covey (1989) grouped
these characteristics in a specific ethic he labeled the Character Ethic. Some of the virtues
the make up the Character Ethic are integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage,
justice, patience, industry, simplicity, modesty, self-discipline, compassion,
responsibility, friendship, perseverance, honesty, loyalty and faith. These
characteristics are not only exhibited by St. Francis but the text reveals that a vast
majority of his followers also demonstrated many of the same virtues. Fisher
(1987/1989) maintains that the probability of a narrative is founded on characterological
coherence as well as material and structural coherence. Throughout the narratives, the
friars consistently exemplify these and other virtues and thus furnishes a sense of
coherence for the reader. Brother Bernard is said to have "constancy and virtue in not
being at all disturbed by any injury or insult" (Brown, 1958, p. 53) and "remained
patient" (Brown, 1958, p. 53) when faced with adversity. Brother Bernard is also
described as "a true and humble disciple" (Brown, 1958, p. 54) of Francis and "was so
holy" (Brown, 1958, p. 54) that Francis had great affection for him.

Brother Bernard is just the first of St. Francis friars, another follower, Brother
Leo, is described as "very pure-hearted . . . with the simplicity of a dove" (Brown, 1958,
Brother Masseo was not only “a man of great holiness and discernment and grace” (Brown, 1958, p. 62) but was also “obedient” (Brown, 1958, p. 64) and had “humility” (Brown, 1958, p. 67). “Because of poverty” the brothers who lived in a small Place “slept on the ground without beds” (Brown, 1958, p. 78) and the five thousand brothers who attended the first General Assembly “slept on the bare ground or on some straw, and their pillows were stones or pieces of wood” (Brown, 1958, p. 80). Brother Pellegrino, “one of the most perfect friars in this world” (Brown, 1958, p. 108), was considered to be a true “pilgrim” (Brown, 1958, p. 108) who did not “find peace in any creature or attach his affections to any temporal thing” (Brown, 1958, p. 108-9) was said to have “climbed from virtue to virtue” (Brown, 1958, p. 109) until he rested in peace at the end of his life. His companion Brother Riccieri was described as “living in great sanctity and humility . . . devoutly and faithfully serving his neighbors” (Brown, 1958, p. 109). A final example of the virtues exemplified by the friars comes from a chapter describing a friar new to the order. The friar was initially said to be “acting so childishy and foolishly that he was disturbing both the old and young member of the community very much” (Brown, 1958, p. 140). One of the older friars took him aside and “in all charity he said such persuasive and inspired words of reproof” (Brown, 1958, p. 140) that the young man was “changed into another man: from a child he became a mature man, so obedient, so thoughtful and kind, so devout, so peaceable and helpful and so eager to practice all virtues” (Brown, 1958, p. 140). It becomes apparent from the previous examples that the characters in the narratives act in a manner consistent with what we
would expect from followers of St. Francis. This consistency and characterological coherence lends to the probability of the narratives.

The evidence that the characters in the text exhibit qualities which are called for by contemporary authors contribute to the fidelity of the text for present day Christians. These qualities are consistent with those that Christians are called to have as part of their method of dealing with others. The golden rule comes from the Old Testament "do to no one what you yourself dislike" (Tobit 4:15) as well as the New Testament "treat others the way you would have them treat you (Matthew 7:12). The narratives in the text reveal that the followers of St. Francis act in a manner congruous to this rule.

Contemporary Christians also espouse this rule as a tenet of their lives. Covey (1989) believes that people "can only experience true success and enduring happiness" (p. 18) by integrating the principles of the character ethic into their character. This includes following the golden rule.

When St. Francis is preaching this way of living to his followers, the reader might feel like they are being preached to as well. The following passage is a good example.

And after preaching very devoutly on these words, [St. Francis] consoled and encouraged all the friars to . . sweet brotherly love, to pray for all the people of God, to have patience in the adversities of the world and temperance in prosperity, to maintain an angelic purity and chastity, to remain in peace and harmony with God and with men and with their own conscience, to humility and meekness toward all, to the contempt of the world and a love and fervent practice
Within this passage we find St. Francis exhorting his followers to adopt the virtues outlined but the rhetoric can also induce the reader of the text to embrace these virtues as well. In applying the narrative theory, it is appropriate to focus on the audience's response to that inducement. I as the critic, find myself experiencing an immediate, emotional, and intuitive response that is not based on reasoned analysis when I read this exhortation. It induces me to want to adopt the virtues delineated within the sermon.

Fisher (1987/1989) explains that Burke viewed rhetoric fundamentally as an ontological experience that worked by identification. That is to say, the audience is persuaded to adopt the values forwarded by the narratives because they identify with the characters of the narratives. The principle operative of a narrative is to induce identification rather than merely passing on details of an account. The primary reason we identify with the stories or accounts is because we find that they offer us "good reasons" for being accepted (Fisher, 1987/1989). Throughout this essay, I have explained the "good reasons" that the text provides to induce the audience to adopt the values forwarded by the narratives. These "good reasons" are the "stuff of the stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reasoning - valuing animals and . . . the communicative expressions of social reality" (Fisher, 1987/1989, p. 65). It is by believing the "good reasons," accepting the values, and identifying with the characters in some way that the audience is persuaded by the narratives.

Christians, by definition, are those people who "have the qualities demonstrated and taught by Jesus Christ, as love, kindness, humility, etc." (Webster, 1988). Many of
the primary characters in the narratives exemplified these same qualities. Contemporary Christians can identify with the characters because they are examples of the kind of people Christians are called to be. It is through this identification and adoption of the values advanced by the narratives that Christians ultimately are persuaded by The Little Flowers of St. Francis. Since contemporary Christians are called to live out the same values as Christians of the past, The Little Flowers of St. Francis provides examples to emulate as well as a method to live out those values. With a reliable example to follow, modern Christians living in an unsupportive society can work to eliminate the spiritual dryness that pervades their culture.
Chapter Four

Conclusions and Implications

Kenneth Burke (1941/1973) speaks of rhetoric as "an immense, ongoing conversation that continues across the centuries" (p. 110-111). Brock, et. al (1990), the authors of *Methods of Rhetorical Criticism*, focus the definition more specifically to "the human effort to induce cooperation" (p. 14). When we combine these two definitions of rhetoric, we evince a definition that explains the rhetoric within *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*. That is to say the rhetoric of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is an immense, ongoing human effort to induce cooperation that continues across the centuries. In reference to this text, it is particularly true that the conversation has continued across centuries considering that it was written over seven hundred years ago and has been republished in English as recently as 1998.

Within the literature pertaining to rhetoric, there are a variety of legitimate purposes for a person to engage in the criticism of rhetoric. A critic may try to assess the persuasive effect of a rhetorical artifact; or make important contributions to social and intellectual history (Brock, et. al., 1990). According to Sonja Foss (1989), we may also engage in rhetorical criticism to increase our own as well as other people's understanding and appreciation of an artifact. This is the reason I chose to do a rhetorical criticism of an artifact over seven hundred years old. I endeavored to uncover and understand the persuasive effect the text could have on contemporary Christians as well as help others appreciate this important work.
Just as there are a variety of reasons to engage in rhetorical criticism, there are a number of reasons to examine narratives in particular. The critic may be interested in determining how the structure of a narrative may influence the interpretation of a situation. Or they may choose to analyze aspects of narratives to discover the possible effects that the narratives may have on an audience. Or “narratives may also be examined for what they reveal about an individual’s or culture’s identity” (Foss, 1989, p.401). In examining *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, I was able to look at the effects that the narratives may have on a contemporary audience as well as reveal something about the Franciscan culture’s identity. Identifying the tyrannizing image contributed to discovering why this culture had the particular identity that was revealed through the narratives.

Fisher (1987/1989) makes the statement that humans are storytellers. Along with this, he claims that a story can be determined to be rational if the reader is convinced that the story is probable based on their own experiences. We as humans read or listen to a story and decide if the story rings true to our own experiences. Even though *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* was written over seven hundred years ago, there were many instances provided in this essay where the story rang true to my own experience. According to Fisher (1987/1989), if we can relate to the narratives and find that they express a truth that we have found to be present in our own lives, we can sense the story has fidelity. The fact that the stories expressed truths that I found in my own life, provided me, the critic, evidence of fidelity within the narrative. A final tool to determine if the story has fidelity is to recognize if the rhetoric provides “good reasons” to accept
and adhere to the values or beliefs forwarded by the text. Throughout this essay, I have provided many "good reasons" to accept and adhere to the values within the text.

Weaver (1948) presents the concept that ethical rhetoric has the capacity to "perfect men by showing them better versions of themselves" (p. 1043). The Little Flowers of St. Francis is a good example of what Weaver (1948) was referring to as ethical rhetoric. The followers of St. Francis were ordinary men facing ordinary trials very similar to contemporary Christians. By furnishing illustrations of these ordinary men who lived lives of humility, obedience, simplicity, love, temperance, etc., the narratives provide models of "better versions of themselves" to the readers thereby increasing their capacity to perfect themselves. This is the type of literature called for by Covey (1989) and Bellah (1996) as a depiction of the Character Ethic that can help stem the tide of American individualism.

It is generally agreed to by Franciscan historians (Felder, 1982; Moorman, 1968; Brown, 1958) that many of the vignettes within The Little Flowers of St. Francis are not necessarily considered factual historical accounts in the modern sense, but instead are oral traditions akin to legends. Throughout time, though, these stories helped to revolutionize Christianity even as Christianity transformed the ethics of the West. The fact that the stories are legendary makes the narratives more interesting, in my opinion, because they were specifically chosen to be included in a text designed especially to be persuasive. According to Brown (1958), the stories were written to depict a vision of St. Francis that was more ascetic than the second biography which was written after St. Francis died. Sillars (1991) claims that "whether the stories are true is not the point" (p. 150) but that
people define their world by the stories they tell. The stories found in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* are the ones specifically chosen originally by Ugolino and consequently by the unknown translator to define a particular world.

"When people attach such values as rationality, common sense or truthfulness to behavior, they identify what actions 'make sense'" (Sillars, 1991, p. 150). The narratives do not need to be factual, in the customary understanding of the word, for the stories to make sense. They can be used to validate the preferred character traits of the culture. This in no way denigrates the importance of the stories. On the contrary, the fact that the stories are specifically chosen to substantiate the preferred character traits of the Franciscan culture can lead one to view *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* as being more persuasive than a factual historical review.

The preferred character traits or values promoted by the narratives not only are relevant to the identity of the culture depicted in the text but to contemporary Christians as well. Contemporary Christians, merely by professing to be a Christian, are encouraged to adopt the characteristics of Christ. The characters in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* follow St. Francis who was "conformed to Christ in all the acts of his life" (Brown, 1958, p. 41). Thus, contemporary Christians can use St. Francis and his followers as appropriate examples of Christian living. Contemporary Christians can appreciate the values encouraged by the text because St. Francis and his followers are similar to themselves in many ways. There should be no dilemma in using St. Francis and his followers as examples because, although the time period is different, many of the struggles are similar.
Encouraging identification of the reader to the characters and values in the stories is an important aspect of persuasive rhetoric. The audience should be motivated to use the characters within the narratives as role models to imitate. Fisher (1987/1989) quotes Chiam Perelman as arguing that

an efficacious argument is one which succeeds in increasing this intensity of adherence among those who hear it in such a way as to set in motion the intended action (a positive action or an abstention from action) or at least in creating in the hearers a willingness to act which will appear at the right moment.

(p. 125)

To be an efficacious argument, *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* must instill a desire in the audience the desire to act. The values revealed by the narratives are a persuasive force in themselves and according to Fisher (1987/1989) “constitute reasons in and of themselves” (p. 138) for adherence. Knowing the tyrannizing image of the culture can contribute to a desire to conform to the values.

Understanding that the tyrannizing image that drives the culture in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is God is one reason contemporary Christians can appreciate the narratives. God is considered to be the image which present-day Christians are striving toward as well. Western culture has been notably influenced by the Judeo-Christian ethic (Bellah, 1996). In spite of its continuing influence, Covey (1989) has observed that there is a startling lack of Judeo-Christian ethic in the literature of the last fifty years. Modern Christians will find a new appreciation for texts such as *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*
because of the dearth of the recent material which promotes God and the Judeo-Christian ethic also understood as the Character Ethic.

Weaver (1953) asserts that rhetoric urges acceptance of a distinctive arrangement of the world. Rhetors “try to persuade the audience to read the world as they do” (Weaver, 1958, p. 58). One method rhetors employ to communicate their world view is through the use of ultimate terms. These terms are paid the highest respect by the culture as well as the rhetor. The terms represent or reveal the ideal of a culture - the tyrannizing image. For the critic, to examine the ultimate terms can reveal why a culture maintains a particular identity while the narrative method merely reveals the identity. In terms of The Little Flowers of St. Francis, examining the ultimate terms uncovered the tyrannizing image to be God. This is not unusual considering the culture discussed in the text. The text concerns a religious community surrounding an icon of the Christian influence. God as the ideal would not be a particular surprise to those who hold St. Francis in high esteem or even to modern Christians who don’t know very much about the Saint.

The analysis of The Little Flowers of St. Francis revealed a culture that lives by the tyrannizing of God by virtue of the ultimate terms uncovered. The “god terms” and “devil terms” are vital to the process. The interpretation of the god terms of “holy” and “divine” can be appreciated in two ways, both of which uphold God as the image to strive for. The initial way of rendering the meaning of both terms in the text would be to see that they refer to something that is given from, belonging to or inspired by God. This interpretation obviously points to God. The second explanation of how the words are used in the text is to see that “holy” means something that is regarded with or deserving
of great respect or reverence; while “divine” is that which is supremely great or good. For Christians, the second interpretation points to God as well because anything which is deserving of great respect or reverence or is supremely great comes from God.

The ancillary terms of the text reveals the ideals that are important to the culture depicted in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*. The ancillary terms of “poverty,” “obedience,” and “chastity” are found in the Rule of St. Francis as well as being an important part of the Franciscan culture. The other ancillary terms of “love,” “humility,” and “wisdom” have been expressed as ideals of St. Francis that can help lead a person to God. These ancillary terms when paired with the god terms, which give them increased rhetorical power, define a culture that has God as its ultimate objective. In moving toward an ultimate objective, a culture necessarily moves away from anything that would be considered a hindrance to the goal. In the drive toward God, the culture portrayed in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* moves away from the trappings of the man-made secular world. “World” is the only devil term of the text.

Weaver (1958) suggests that an examination of the ultimate terms can reveal if the god terms and devil terms appropriately reflect the values of the culture. There is worth, then, in evaluating a text that one would assume to have a particular tyrannizing image simply to discern if it does, in fact, uphold that image. In reference to *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, there were no surprises. The text is about a Christian saint and his community; the tyrannizing image is God.

Modern critics will find that the narrative method of criticism can increase the appreciation and understanding of older artifacts. Older artifacts, especially persuasive
ones, have value and are worth examining for a variety of reasons. We can unearth the social reality that they create; we can evaluate how they function as an argument to view and understand a distinctive way to look at the world; we can discover the likely persuasive effects they may have on an audience; or we can determine the identity of the particular culture that they represent. This identity involves, but is not limited to, the ideal, values, characters, actions and settings expressed in the narratives. Examining narratives with the narrative method may not tell us what drives the people of the culture to aspire to that identity. Critics can then turn to understanding the tyrannizing image through investigating the ultimate terms to discover the driving force behind the members of the culture. Combining both the narrative method and looking at the ultimate terms can reveal more about the artifact than either method can disclose independently.

One of the problems I encountered in my attempt to analyze *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* was limiting the analysis to the two theories. There are a number of methods that could have been employed while performing a rhetorical analysis on the text. Edwin Black (1990) maintains that in the process of analyzing rhetoric “what equally solicits our attention is that there is a second persona also implied by the discourse, and that persona is its implied auditor” (p. 190). It would be interesting to uncover and understand the implied auditor to examine whether it is the same as the actual auditor. By performing this type of analysis the critic can also “see in the auditor implied by a discourse a model of what the rhetor would have his real audience become” (Black, 1990, p. 192). This would be an especially interesting analysis considering the age of the text and purpose for which it was written.
Another method of rhetorical criticism that could be employed in an analysis of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* is the metaphoric perspective. There are a large number of metaphors in the narratives that could be explored. Metaphoric critics believe that metaphors "are the means by which arguments are expressed" (Burchardt, 1995, p. 335). Since the metaphors within the text may provide insight to the rhetor's social reality, it would be interesting to evaluate those in light of the community that the author was writing about. The field of rhetorical criticism could benefit from additional analysis of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* by either of these suggested methods or any other perspective.

Other historical Christian texts deserve the same sort of analysis as well. Contemporary Christians are encouraged to study *The Imitation of Christ* attributed to Thomas a Kempis. The text was written around 1427 but by 1779 no less than 1,800 translations and editions could be counted (Gardiner, 1989). The last publication of the text in the United States was as recent as 1998 and warrants analysis because of its popularity and the probable impact on contemporary Christians. *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, written in 1608 by St. Francis De Sales, is another historical Christian document which would provide an interesting rhetorical study. It, too, is a written work frequently suggested for Christians to read as a means of deepening their spiritual walk. It continues to be published as well. A rhetorical analysis would contribute to the understanding and appreciation of these, as well as innumerable other, historical Christian texts.
As I stated previously in this chapter, utilizing both the narrative theory and extracting the ultimate terms from a text reveals much more about the culture in the text than either method could uncover independently. Since the tyrannizing image of contemporary culture has changed, it would be interesting to look at some of the modern fictional authors to discover what the ideal is in their narratives. One could determine if the narratives were probable and had fidelity as well as determine if the tyrannizing image was appropriate to the culture that was being portrayed. One could also evaluate some of the contemporary films using both methods together to determine if the story rings true to life and exposes a tyrannizing image appropriate to the culture in the film. There are a variety of artifacts that these combined methods could be applied to for determining if the tyrannizing image has any bearing on the fidelity and probability of the narratives. Texts written by current cultural critics, like Richard Sennett, would be interesting well as current spiritual authors like John Michael Talbot. Caroline Myss is a popular contemporary self-help author who incorporates stories in her work. These texts would be fascinating to evaluate using the narrative approach and examining the ultimate terms. The surface of the sea of possibilities has just barely been touched.
References


1. Since the text has been translated into Italian and then into English, I am aware that mistakes in translations are possible. I am only concerned about the impact of this English version on twenty-first century Christians and therefore the fidelity of the translation to the original text is not an issue.

2. The Exarchate included the cities and regions of Ravenna and the surrounding territories; Padua; Bologna; the duchy of Venetia; Istria; the Pentapolis; Genoa and Ligurian Riveria; Rome and its duchy; Naples and its territories; the heel and toe of Italy; and Sicily and Sardinia.

3. The feudal system was the economic, political and social system in medieval Europe in which land was worked by serfs, who were bound to it, and was held by vassals in exchange for services from the overlords. The pope was an overlord.

4. Mendicants were traveling ministers who went out preaching and teaching but had to beg for their food and shelter.

5. Joachim was an Abbott who lived in the twelfth century. He was considered a heretic because he taught, among other things, that there was a “carnal” church that was persecuting the “spiritual” church and that one should withdraw from the teachings of the Roman Church. He also taught that they were living in the last days and believers should get ready for the coming of Antichrist. Lastly, Joachim taught that to be a spiritual person, one is to despise the things of the world.