



The Leadership Aesthetics of Saint Francis of Assisi

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the aesthetic nature of leadership as exemplified by the life and ministry of Saint Francis of Assisi (1182-1226). I will begin by exploring the conceptual definitions of aesthetics and the development of contemporary thought about aesthetics in the context of leadership praxis. After identifying categories of aesthetics, we will later compare those categories to narrative accounts of St. Francis' life and public ministry. I will contend that, based on the somewhat limited records, Saint Francis was an early Christian leader whose life and personal ministry often exemplified an aesthetic approach to leadership. Finally, I will conclude that the aesthetic nature of leadership, as illuminated by the life of St. Francis, might help us grasp a more integrated and holistic understanding of the nature of leadership in the 21st Century.

An Incomplete Picture

There appears to be no shortage of definitions of leadership that appear to have emerged as a reflection of the respective scholarly communities for decades, with apparently little enduring consensus along the way. Twelve years ago, Bennis and Nanus (1996) located 350 separate definitions (Russell, 2003). This paper will not endeavor to add to the mix in that general regard. Rather, our attention will be focused on better understanding one aspect of leadership that has received scant attention; that is, the aesthetic processes of leadership as animated in the stories of an extraordinary man.

The initial steps on this journey are to identify the nature and process of aesthetics as it has arisen within the context of organizational and leadership studies, and then to describe the aesthetic leadership

process itself. Dwelling on the nature of aesthetics first will prove helpful and relevant to a later discussion about St. Francis' leadership choices in his day.

When modern social scientists search for causal explanations to decipher the nature of leadership and organizational behavior by objective, scientific methodologies, they often appear to presuppose that organizations behave in largely rational ways (Strati, 2000). A widespread sense that such assumptions can paint an incomplete picture is reinforced by both leadership experience and the lack of significant convergence in the body of organizational leadership theory. Antonio Strati (2000) described this problem that is presented by this limited understanding as “the myth of the rationality of organizations” (p. 14).

Positivist and rational approaches to understanding leadership have produced large bodies of theory about behavior, style and technique, but much less is really known about what actually takes place in the relational enactment between leader and follower (Ladkin, 2008). Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer (2007, p. 553) suggested that leadership theorists who adhere strictly in the social scientific methods that mimic natural scientific methods, “take a rational view that is too narrow to describe...more complex human experiences of leadership.”

The outcomes in leadership theory have often proven unsatisfying. Thirty four years ago, R. M. Stogdill (1974, p. vii, as cited in Howard, 1996), in his well recognized *Handbook of Leadership*, noted that despite decades of research at that time, “the endless accumulation of empirical data has not produced an integrated understanding of leadership.” More recently, V.A. Howard (1996, p. 21) was acerbic in his description of the limits of the exclusively rationalist approach to the task of fully comprehending the leadership phenomenon:

For the past sixty years social scientists have gone off in Quixotic quest for lofty leadership as if it were a matter of getting a few definitions and categories straight, collect a few data, identify the skills or “constants” of successful incumbents, and then read off the nature of leadership for any given domain. This is the worst kind of Aristotelian essentialism engendering a flood of social science fiction with no let-up in sight.

Aesthetic Knowledge

Psychologist Rollo May once posited the question, “what if imagination and art are not frosting at all but the fountainhead of human experience?” (DeCiantis, 1996, p. 87). Philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1735, 1750) along with Giambattista Vico (1725) first argued for more holistic conceptualizations of knowledge that included ways of ascertaining knowledge and knowing that were “distinct from intellectual and rational knowledge” (as cited in Strati, 2000, p.14). According to Strati (2000, p. 14), both Baumgarten

and Vico (1725) regarded aesthetics as “a specific way of knowing distinct from intellectual and rational knowledge.” Vico (1725) referred to this a “wisdom that is not rational, but poetic” (as cited in Strati, 2000, p. 15). Vico (1725) contended that the aesthetic understanding of the world is rooted, in part, in relations that are not reasoned, but which “bind us to the surrounding reality” (as cited in Strati, 2000, p. 15.)

Vico (1725) elucidated a wider understanding of logic and wisdom as may be expressed in such artifacts as the poetic fable, mythic narratives, metaphor, or the mute gesture (as cited in Strati, 2000, p. 15). Central to much of this paper, Vico (1725) believed that spiritual meanings were communicated in this manner—a relationship and process quite distinct from the Cartesian rationality and duality that was on the rise in his time and has come to dominate contemporary thinking today (as cited in Strati, 2000, p. 15).

The Greek word “aesthetikos” may be translated as aesthetics, typically referring to a “sense perception as a source of knowledge” (Merritt & DeGraff, 1996, p. 73). Strati (2000, p. 16) emphasized that aesthetics is not simply a receptive feeling through physical perceptions; rather, the Greek word *aisthananomai* is a verb form of the word which suggests an active “stimulation of the abilities related to feeling.” In a proactive sense of gaining knowledge, Strati (2000) and Marguard (1989) argued that “aesthetics is an aid to observation” (Strati, 2000, p. 16).

However, the precise descriptions and understanding of aesthetics have fluctuated for centuries, often in a reflection of the times (Heifetz, 1966). Baumgarten’s (1735) earlier references to aesthetics related in part to the philosophy and science of the beautiful. In Immanuel Kant’s (1790) *Critique of Judgment*, aesthetics was identified, along with moral and empirical knowledge, as a type of cognition (Merritt & DeGraff, 1996). For Kant, aesthetics was “the road to grasp an art” which he saw as a matter of divine grace and inspiration (Monthoux, 2000, p. 36).

Dewey (1934) saw aesthetics in narrower terms; as an emotional quality that is part of a complete experience which “cannot be sharply marked off from intellectual experience since the latter must bear an aesthetic stamp to be itself complete” (Dewey, 1934, as cited in Howard, 1966, p. 26). In a broader contemporary view, Howard (1966, p. 26) defined the aesthetic sensibility or “orientation” as:

...a cognitive capacity encompassing much more than the experience, perception, or expression of emotions. At the very least, it includes a host of “readings” (interpretations) of the nuances of experienced situations and challenges, all of which are symbolically mediated in a variety of ways: facial expressions, postures (“body language”), tones of voice, what gets said, or meant if not actually said.

Aesthetic Categories

Strati (2000) identified aesthetic “categories” that will serve to focus our comprehension of aesthetics, particularly in the later context of aesthetic leadership. These categories included beauty, the sublime, the ugly, the comic, the gracious, the picturesque and agogic, the tragic and the sacred. We shall explore the individual characteristic qualities of each of Strati’s aesthetic definitions later in the paper when I compare how some of these aesthetic categories appear to comport with the personal enactments and leadership expressions of St. Francis.

Strati’s (2000) categories of aesthetics provides one way of navigating the large and frequently uncharted territories of the aesthetic nature of leadership. Despite the breadth of definitions through the ages, it is the link between the aesthetic approach to knowing and the apprehension of virtue—Kant’s “road” paved by divine grace and inspiration-- that may yield fruit as this paper looks at the aesthetic leadership choices made by Saint Francis to communicate his ministry.

In one of the earliest references, Ladkin (2008) noted that Plato, in his “forms” originally found a relationship between the sense of what is beautiful to both our senses and our intellect, and the soul. Dobson (1999) also argued that “aesthetic development is a key path to developing virtue, and it is virtue which should act as the means by which organizational decisions should be taken” (p. 40). Amid the varied attempts at description, the threads of beauty, morality, and virtue are ultimately interwoven into the fabric of aesthetics. These connections will become more apparent as the discussion of aesthetic leadership is placed within the narrative context of the life of St. Francis.

Aesthetic Leadership

An aesthetic understanding of leadership and organizations emerged in the mid-1980s as part of the scholarly challenge to positivist and rational paradigms discussed earlier (Strati, 2000, p. 28). A number of literature reviews have explored the relationships between organizations, leadership, and aesthetics (Dean, et al., 1997; Gagliardi, 1996; Ramirez, 2005; Strati, 1999; Taylor and Hansen, 2005, as cited in Hansen, Ropo, & Sauer, 2007). As theorists broke away from positivist paradigms and adopted more social constructionist views of leadership, more room was created on the landscape for revisiting the impact of aesthetics and leadership. Two scholarly movements-- one growing along the lines of interest in social constructionist, subjective and symbolic approaches to leadership, and the other movement that has renewed interest in social influence and followership, have each opened the doors for a resurgence of interest in leadership aesthetics (Hansen, Ropo, & Sauer, 2007, p. 55). For example. Horth and Palus (1996, p. 54) built their understanding of

leadership aesthetics on the framework that “leadership is, at its root, a set of social meaning-making processes...”

Yet, much of current research is less expressive of antagonism toward empirical methods and more holistic in its suggestion that aesthetics offers a more complete understanding of the nature of leadership. Palus and Horth (1996) argued for the necessity of examining organizations and leadership from an aesthetic viewpoint:

In attempting to make sense of their challenges, organizations have become overly reliant on rational-analytical competencies, such as deductive reasoning employed within a set of accepted paradigms, numeric criteria and formula, the compartmentalization of problems, and standard operating procedures. Rational-analytical competencies are obviously valuable but, we argue, insufficient in themselves (p.1).

Organizational theorist Chester Bernard stressed the centrality of understanding the aesthetic side of leadership such as “feeling, judgment and sense,” even while he observed that organizational studies emphasize only “the scientific realist approach in search of effectiveness (Bernard, 1938, p. 235, as cited in Ladkin, 2008).

When strictly positivist orientations failed to fully account for leadership effectiveness, further interest was spurred in more aesthetic explanations of leadership. In his book, *Managing as a Performing Art*, Peter Vaill (1989, p. 2) described the dilemma faced by leaders today as one of trying to lead in an age of “permanent white water” where change, uncertainty and turbulence are swamping even the most able leaders.

Some researchers suggest that the mitigation of such uncertainties might be found in aesthetic approaches to the leadership challenges. For example, Drath and Palus (1994) operate the Center for Creative Leadership, where they offer practical aesthetic approaches to leadership. They posit that leadership is “meaning making in a community of practice” (Drath and Palus, 1994, as cited in DeCiantis, 1996, p. 88). DeCiantis (1996, p. 88) also compared leadership to art because “in its creation of shared meaning, it is inherently social.”

Abraham Zalenik (1992) echoed similar sentiments in building the case for aesthetic leadership, arguing that “business leaders have much more in common with artists, scientists and other creative thinkers than they do with managers (Zalenick, 1992, as cited in DeCiantis, 1996, p. 87). This art-making sense of leadership has offered new directions for leadership study to meet complex challenges inasmuch as art, like leadership, “is a process of exploration and inquiry which has the power to connect us with what is most deeply held within each of us” (DeCiantis, 1996). As Palus and Horth (1996) put it:

“Our premise is that the artistic processes are especially germane to doing complex work. Leadership in response to complex changes requires artistry, not as a matter of mere style or embellishment, but as a necessary component of its meaning making process (p. 55).

Palus and Horth (1996) challenge leaders to develop what they term “aesthetic competencies” in addition to their rational-analytic capabilities (p. 59). They argue that aesthetic competencies “are those that which make possible the art of leadership, the art of making cognitive and emotional, individual and collective sense of complex realities” especially in times of challenge and uncertainty (Palus & Horth, 1996, p. 53). Perhaps it was due in part to such aesthetic competencies that enabled a poor monk to arise amid the turbulence of the early 13th Century to influence hundreds people, from the peasants in his shire to the prelates and kings who ruled over them, and to blaze a leadership trail that would still be visible centuries later.

Models of Aesthetic Leadership

Duke (1986) proposed a simple model of aesthetic leadership (See Fig. 1). Duke proposed a model that is drawn from his orientation in cognitive psychology, arguing that the behavior of a leader is not leadership “until it is perceived to be so by the observer” (Duke, 1986, p. 14). Duke (1986) contended that the meaning extracted by the observer is subject to the influence of present and past beliefs and experiences, as well as cultural contexts (p. 15).

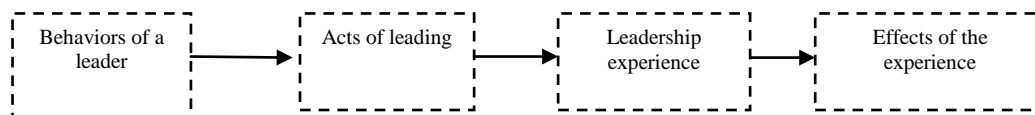


Figure 1. Duke's (1986) Aesthetic Model of Leadership describes the effects of the leadership experience.

Perhaps the value of Duke's (1986) paradigm is that it drew attention to the experience of leadership, including the experience of the follower. However, it remained directional in nature, with the leader largely acting upon the follower, even in its aesthetic sense. Perhaps that is because Duke's (1989) model fit the heavily leader-oriented research of the period. Hollander (1974) identified the predominant view of earlier leadership research that had largely viewed followers strictly as “non-leaders...an essentially passive residual category” (Hollander, 1974, as cited in Baker, 2007, p. 51). Duke's model does not represent more current leadership understandings that might develop the interaction between leader and follower in co-enact a more

mutual, intersubjective, relational leadership experience (Russell, 2003; Avolio, 1999; Burns 1978; Fairhurst & Sauer, 1996; Gini, 1998; Hansen, Ropo, & Sauer, 2007).

As observed in the comparative models provided by Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer (2007, Figure 2) the focus of contemporary research has opened up a wider exploration of the subjective leadership dynamic. For example, Kelly (1988) and Chaleff (1995) focused more attention and research on followership, an emerging area of research that has also been reflected the rise of flatter organizations in contemporary society (Russell, 2003; Baker, 2007).

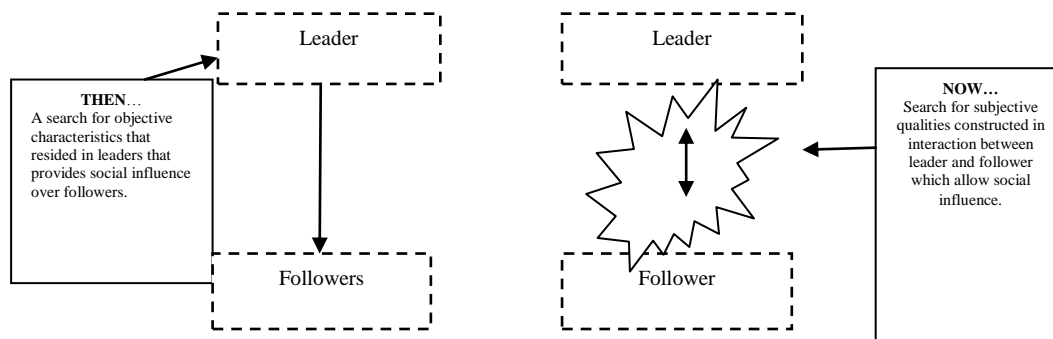


Figure 2. Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer's (2007) model to describe the changing focus of leadership research that has enabled more attention to nature of the aesthetic leadership experience.

Despite a lingering heavy directional focus on the leader, Duke's (1986) model drew crucial attention to the role of experience and perception in ascertaining the aesthetic nature of leadership. The roots of aesthetic leadership are grounded in the aesthetic concept of knowing and understanding in non-rational ways, as discussed earlier this paper. Taylor and Hansen (2005, as cited in Hansen, et al., 2007) have reinforced that the engagement of the senses and the focus on the experiential as enduring components of aesthetic leadership. Hansen, Ropo and Sauer (2007, p. 550) have also point out that particular aesthetic insights "are not easily detached from the aesthetic experience" and cannot be reached "by any other route than by tapping into the aesthetic side of organizational life." During recent decades, when many researchers were heavily reliant on more detached, abstract, rational, instrumental, logical, even sterile approaches, the requirement to actually experience aesthetic leadership in order to fully comprehend it may be one fairly evident reason for the late blooming of the study of aesthetics and its contributions to the leadership process.

Enacting Aesthetic Leadership

How does one study the enactment of aesthetic leadership if it is largely determined by a subjective and constructed experience between the leader and follower? How might a researcher be confident that one is observing the enactment of aesthetic leadership, rather than the potential explanations that are offered by any number of other more established leadership theories?

This paper will endeavor to illustrate Strati's (2000) categories of aesthetics with the limited narrative accounts of St. Francis' life and leadership. What comparisons I draw are not to the exclusion of many other plausible theories that may be operating in an explanation of St. Francis' leadership behavior. Many leadership theories might be argued as applicable to St. Francis' life; such as transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1997; as cited in Bass, 1990), charismatic theory (Conger & Kanungo, 1988, as cited in Hansen, et al., 2007) inspirational leadership (Downtown, 1973; Vaill, 1978; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1982; Heifetz & Snyder, 1987, as cited in Bass, 1990) authentic leadership (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005, as cited in Hansen, et al., 2007) and Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Patterson, 2003) among others. In such light, this paper does not develop its comparisons on St. Francis and aesthetic leadership to the exclusion of other plausible and potentially less aesthetic explanations. Rather, I might contend in keeping with Baumgarten's (1735) and Vico's (1725) explanations, which suggest that aesthetic experiences are often complimentary to more quantifiable constructs (as cited in Strati, 2000).

Further, the drawing of comparisons offers no more than a surmise at the distance of eight centuries—we do not have interviews with Saint Francis or his followers and quite limited narrative materials to explore. Not unsurprisingly, this comparative process may leave a large volume of uncertainty in the air, which may be unavoidable in part due to the purely subjective and qualitative nature of aesthetical experiences. However, the following narrative comparison does provide one vantage point for recognizing the potential contributions of aesthetic leadership to a more well-rounded understanding of the enactive leadership process.

Saint Francis

Francis di Pietro was born in the rural Umbrian town of Assisi in 1181 or 1182 (Vaughn, 1982; Spoto, 2002). He was the eldest son of a textile merchant who owned about a dozen farms and who traveled widely trading in dyed and imported cloths (Vaughn, 1982). Francis grew up with two younger siblings, enjoying the privileges of an expanding mercantile class. Like other eldest males of his social class, he followed in the path of his father, Pietro, to learn the family trade (House, 2001). His mother, Pica, was a Christian who raised him on Greek and Roman legends, the lives of saints, and the great lore of conquests by Alexander and Julius

Caesar (House, 2001). She also taught him to sing songs of chivalry in Latin, French and Umbrian, which fit well with Francis' outgoing nature (House, 2001).

Francis and Education

Francis grew up with a typical medieval education, studying grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, math, arithmetic, geometry, and medieval astronomy (House, 2001). While he attended the local parish church, Assisi's pagan influences and the city's "louche atmosphere" would soon catch the young man's attention and his energies (House, 2001, p. 24).

Francis did not go to university, and later, he eschewed formal education with a sense that too much book learning, even of the sacred texts, would lead to spiritual and intellectual pride (House, 2001). Late in his ministry, Francis relented and allowed followers to pursue further education, but with his strong words of caution. In a letter to a brilliant young friar, he wrote, "It pleases me that you are teaching the brothers sacred theology so long as, in accord with the words of our Rule, you do not 'extinguish the spirit of holy prayer and devotion'" (House, 2001, p. 239).

It has been argued that Francis did not possess formal literate knowledge in the typical sense of rules of writing and composition (Vaughn, 1982). Yet, it may have been less a concern for traditional learning and letters that so worried Francis and kept him from the traditions of a university education. He clearly valued and memorized the scriptures, taught others to do so, and wrote both captivating music and enduring poetry (House, 2001). It was perhaps due to his aesthetic approach to ministry; namely he believed in the paramount value of the spiritual experience that was critical to sculpting souls and might otherwise be too easily supplanted by that which addresses only the mind, very often at the expense of the spirit.

Drawing upon an observation of House (2002, p. 165), in Francis' pursuit to knowing God, perhaps he was instinctively setting aside what William Wordsworth called "the meddling intellect" that he might tap into a knowledge of God that is discovered largely by means that are beyond the reach of books and rational approaches.

"I too was at one time tempted to possess books," Francis reportedly said. "But the Gospels showed me the Divine Will; I opened them and my eyes fell on these words: 'To you the hidden things of the kingdom of heaven have been revealed in parables'" (Englebert, 1950, p. 242). Francis stressed the value of developing one's virtue over argument, and pointed out that "our heroes today prefer to acquire glory in the reading of (their) exploits rather than attempting in action to accomplish them" (Englebert, 1950, p. 243).

In one of his written admonitions, Francis explained the difference in the kind of knowledge that was achieved through the experience of becoming a living example of the Scripture:

The Apostle says “the letter kills, but the spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:6). Those are killed by the letter who merely wishes to know the words alone, so that they may be esteemed as wiser than others and be able to acquire great riches to give to (their) relatives and friends. In a similar way, those religious are killed by the letter who do not wish to follow the spirit of the Sacred Scriptures, but only wish to know (what) the words (are) and (how to) interpret them to others. And those are given life by the spirit of Sacred Scriptures who do not refer to themselves any text which they know or seek to know, but, by word and example, return everything to the most high Lord God to whom every good belongs (St. Francis, as cited in House, 2001, p. 30).

Francis was apparently ahead of his time. Leadership author Max DePree (1989) declared that “leadership is an art, something to be learned over time, not simply by reading books” (DeCiantis, 1996, p. 87). Merrit and DeGraff (1996) found that “the answer to questions concerning the relationships between aesthetics and leadership must be arrived at through experience.” Perhaps in a similar manner, it was aesthetic, spiritually discerned lessons that Francis preferred his friars to learn, through direct, experiential ways. This was to be done by avoiding the pitfalls of what he saw as a more detached traditional education. Beyond the reported concerns for spiritual and intellectual pride, it is said that Francis determined to teach “spiritual things spiritually,” in keeping with Saint Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians (The Holy Bible, 1 Corinthians 2:10, as cited in Vaughn, 1982).

Francis, the Knight

Francis grew up in the turbulence of the late 12th century and early 13th century, as the world emerged from the Dark Ages (Spoto, 2002). Many conflicts swept back and forth seasonally across the region surrounding Assisi, which clung to the slopes of Mount Subasio. Threats of trouble echoed regularly from nearby Perugia, the Saracens, or Muslims, and the Germans (Spoto, 2002; House, 2001).

When a long-running feud between Assisi and nearby Perugia erupted, Francis enlisted in the militia and fought in battle, only to end up imprisoned in the Palace of the Captain of the People in Perugia for more than a year after Assisi lost (Maynard, 1948). Francis had imagined himself with a colorful future as a knight, and he seemed his comrades in captivity to be undaunted in his spirit by the experience. He told them, “Do not marvel that I can exult. The day will come when I shall be worshiped by the whole world” (Maynard, 1948, p. 32.) As Vaughn (1982, p. xi) so aptly observed, Francis prescient statement would lead him to engage in a

different kind of battle as “a knight of Christ and Herald of the Great King, yet only after a great change in himself.”

Francis’ dramatic change of calling would come as Francis departed Assisi again, riding to battle as squire to a local Count. According to the written account of a friend, Angelo, a voice spoke to him in two dreams (House, 2001, p. 49).

In the first dream, Francis envisioned himself in a warehouse filled with saddles, swords and shields. The shields bore the symbol of the cross. “Then the place melted away and enlarged into a great palace. There was a beautiful bride there, his bride. A voice was telling him that all these things were his...with which he was to furnish the knights under his command” (Maynard, 1948).

Francis awoke, excited and assured of glorious victory ahead (Maynard, 1948). Yet, another dream followed, after only a day or two on the road.

The Voice asked, “Do you wish to go to Apulia to the war?”

Francis answered, “Yes, that is my whole purpose.”

“Who do you think will reward you better for this—the master or his servant?” the Voice asked.”

“Francis answered, ‘The Master.’”

“Then why are you leaving the master for the servant?”

“Lord, what do you wish me to do instead,’ Francis replied”

“Return home, and you will be told. The palace and arms you were shown in a dream were not for your knights but for others, and your principality will be different, too.” (House, 2001, p. 49; Maynard, 1948, p. 36)

Francis’ mystical calling was one of many similar revelations in the course of his life. He returned to Assisi the next day (House, 2001). The events that followed are not catalogued here; yet, many key turning points in Francis’ life work to demonstrate an active aesthetic sensibility that would shake the lives of all of those who encountered him.

The Aesthetic Leadership of Saint Francis

Hansen, Ropo, and Sauer (2007, p. 551) found that for visionary leaders, “a leap of faith” is involved. “The motivation to take that leap of faith is not always based on rational, objective, and empirical evidence because there may be none” (Hansen, et al., 2007, p. 551). Such a description of aesthetic leadership comports with Francis at many critical junctures in his life and ministry. Francis was a mystic who relied upon dreams and spiritually discerned leadings at critical junctures throughout his life. Francis often communicated

such spiritually discerned realities by creating aesthetic experiences for his followers. Francis' faith was more caught than taught, as the saying goes, even through the experience of adhering to the Rules that governed his order.

I will compare a number of remarkable anecdotal moments in St. Francis' life and leadership, relying upon Strati's (2000) eight categories of aesthetics as a guide. Specifically, I will compare these aesthetic categories to narrative enactments by St. Francis in his manner and leadership of others. In drawing such comparisons, I hope to demonstrate how aesthetic leadership might be enacted with life-changing results and, consequently, offer a more complete picture of the leadership process.

As referenced earlier in this paper, Strati's (2000) eight categories included beauty, the sublime, the ugly, the comic, the picturesque and agogic, the gracious, the tragic and the sacred.

Beauty

The aesthetic of Beauty encompasses a range of definitions, including "luminosity, symmetry, proportion, capacity to attract and deceive, persuasive force, the manifestation of hidden laws, harmony, beatitude, freedom..." (Strati, 2000, p. 20). Strati (2000) explains that such manifestations in organization life might be used to describe a leader's presentation or how one feels toward a product or how the organization works together. Renato Barilli (1995) notes that the focus on enactment may be less of a matter of mere sentiment and more about the senses and physical perceptions—seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling (as cited in Strati, 2000). The beautiful may follow contemplation of an object or form of behavior that yields an aesthetic knowledge and understanding (Milani, 1991, as cited in Strati, 2000).

Strati (2000) suggested beauty, as "an absolute principle which flanks truth and goodness" may open an exploration of "bonds that tie people to the organizations for which they work, to their work environments, or to the materials that they use and transform" (p. 20).

"Beauty, in all forms, was extremely important to Francis," wrote House (2001, p. 10). Francis' father owned a number of small farms where it is believed that he spent time in the countryside and hunted as a young man prior to his conversion. However, throughout his life, he closely identified with nature. Historian Lynn White (1967) suggested that Francis sparked a new Christian understanding of the relationships between nature, man, and creatures (as cited in House, p. 10). Francis frequently addressed birds and other animals as if they were his brothers and sisters (House, 2001). A Franciscan hermitage now exists above Assisi, owing to the long periods that he took for meditation and retreat in nature. In 1980, Pope John Paul pronounced Francis the patron saint of ecology as a tribute to his intense identification with nature (Vaughn, 1982, p.5).

Francis' own spiritual calling began with a wondrous new sense of beauty that contrasted with his past life of revelry. After his mystical dreams on the road to battle, Francis returned home. He determined not to follow friends into the streets for drinking and dancing. When they asked why, he replied, "I was imagining I was courting the noblest, richest and most beautiful bride ever seen" (House, 2001, p. 51). As House (2001, p. 51) wrote, Francis would later account to his friend, Angelo, that "a sense of overwhelming sweetness had entirely detached him from the physical world, and even if he were cut to pieces he could not have moved."

Such a transcendent sense of beauty was part of what Francis sought to endower in the hearts and minds of others. Philosopher Simone Weil wrote, "The example of St. Francis shows how great a place the beauty of the world can have in Christian thought..." (House, p. 10).

As Francis called others to join him on his mission, he likely realized that the Augustinian and Benedictine rules brought a symmetry and discipline to the shaping of souls of these monastic orders (House, 2001; Vaughn, 1982). However, Francis wanted a much simpler discipline in his Rule. He required that his followers demonstrate a fierce commitment to five obligations in self-restraint; poverty, chastity, humility, obedience, and harmony; and three obligations of unselfish activity--prayer, work, preaching (House, 2001, p. 87, 102). The methodic, daily routines of these rules were not simply ones of disciplining the exterior behavior of followers, but there was a deliberate development of the aesthetic beautifying experience of the soul. As Francis instructed his followers, "Let us keep ourselves from the wisdom of this world and the prudence of the flesh. For the spirit of the flesh desires and is most eager to have words, but cares little to carry them out. And it does not seek a religion and holiness in the inner spirit" (Francis, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, p. 123).

One of the clearest explanations offered of this experiential sculpting of souls came in Francis' *Salutation of the Virtues* (see Appendix A.) In these passages, Francis linked how the experiences of holy wisdom, simplicity, poverty, humility, charity and obedience proved to repel the temptations and sins of the world and of the body, such as pride, avarice and carnal fears (Francis, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, pp. 151-152). Francis' Rule and methods were not simply exterior disciplines, but once exemplified in his own life and in the lives of others, enabled aesthetic experiences that produced and reflected a harmony and holiness of the soul.

The Sublime

The Sublime, as described by Strati (2000), is what emerges from "the nobility of soul wedded to purity, majesty and sacredness" (p. 21). Note the particular similarity in Strati's descriptions of spiritual intensity in moments of intercessions and deep prayer:

It arises in those moments of rapture and euphoria when the personality seemingly disintegrates; it involves the mysterious pleasure aroused by contemplation of tragic events or representations of

terror and anguish. Whereas the beautiful evokes serenity and harmony, the sublime excites pleasure mixed with pain...The sublime is the joy that fills the soul in the presence of whatever is truly such..." (Strati, 2000, p. 21).

St. Francis led his flock to experience the sublime centrality of the eucharist in the Christian faith; that is, the partaking in the body and blood of Christ through the eucharist and wine, then meditating upon His sacrifice. In one account, he wrote to his fellow friars, "Know well that in the sight of God there are certain matters which are very lofty and sublime which are sometimes considered worthless and inferior by people; while there are other things cherished and esteemed by people, which are considered worthless and inferior by God" (Vaughn, 1982, p. 54).

There are a number of pivotal moments in his ministry where an intense, sublime experience in which Francis received a divine insight and guidance for his life and his leadership in the lives of his followers. In 1206, Francis visited the church in San Damiano, a place located on a hillside below Assisi that endures to this day. The story is reported by Francis' friend, Angelo, that he knelt down before a Byzantine iconic crucifix that was hanging over the altar, and featured a suffering Christ (Maynard, 1948; House, 2001). As he prayed, he said that he heard a Voice:

"Francis, don't you see that my house has collapsed? Go and repair it for me."

"Yes, Lord, I will willingly," Francis answered (House, 2001, p. 64).

Angelo wrote that, "It filled him with intense joy to know that Jesus had spoken to him" (House, 2001, p. 64).

There are questions about how such sublime moments may have precisely determined his journey, but there is little question that his intense mystical experiences were an integral part of his leadership direction and ministry. House (2001, p. 64) suggested that the image of suffering Christ on the cross at San Damiano and elsewhere would often reduce Francis "to tears of compassion" and it intensified his desire to deny himself previous comforts. In the case of the mystical encounter before the San Damiano crucifix, he was led to begin literally rebuilding the church there (House, 2001, p. 64). It is relevant to the aesthetic nature of Francis' leadership to note that these moments of deep sublime contemplation often led to more than personal excitement; it led to leadership actions that would fuel his service and shape his ministry.

In another period of sublime and mystical encounters, Francis had retreated to a shallow cave in the steep hills above Poggio Bustone (Maynard, 1948). In one time of deep prayer, it was reported by Thomas of Celano (as cited in House, 2001, p. 85) that Francis contemplated his sins and realized with renewed certainty

that his sins had been fully forgiven—an energizing experience in prayer that is not uncommon among Christians. In his second moment, in the harsh bareness of the cave:

“He was caught up above himself, and absorbed into a kind of light; the capacity of his mind was enlarged, and he could see clearly into the future. He said to his brothers...” “I saw a great many men who wanted to share our way of life—the roads, as it were, filled with Frenchmen, Spaniards, Englishmen and many others, speaking various languages and hurrying toward us.” (I Cel. 26, as cited by House, 2001, p. 85).

The first was intensely personal; the second expanded Francis’ sense of leadership calling to expand his ministry. As demonstrated by Francis, the role of the aesthetic in spiritual formation and leadership often has profound consequences.

Ugliness

Ugliness provides a contrasting backdrop to the beautiful and sublime, ranging from the asymmetrical and the ill-proportioned to the mundane, the mediocre and the fake (Strati, 2000, pp. 21-22). The immoral, profane, banal, repugnant and disfiguring aspects of industrial life are frequent aesthetic responses in contemporary organizational life (Strati, p. 22). Strati (2000) uses the example of the fashion industry, which feigns beauty, but fails in our senses to manifest “the sacred, nor the ideal grandeur of the sublime nor the virtues of grace” (p. 22).

The harsh brutality and ugliness of common life was rarely difficult to locate in the 12th and 13th centuries. Saint Maria delgi Angeli, now situated at the lower reaches of Assisi, once housed the poorest of the poor and a leper colony (Bekker, 2008). Angelo wrote that Francis had faced down his own personal revulsion toward the lepers when met a leper near Assisi, gave the man a coin and kissed his hand. The leper, in turn, gave Francis the kiss of peace (Angelo, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, p. 58). In a document dictated shortly before his death in 1226, Francis recounted this profound encounter with the leper. Bekker (2008) suggests that this was perhaps the key moment that would seal his conversion and the radical nature of his ministry. Francis testified the following:

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed to sweetness of soul and body; and afterwards I lingered a little and left the world” (Testament of Francis, as cited by Vaughn 1982, p. 154.)

Thomas of Celano reported that Francis chose to live among the lepers in the early years and “served them most diligently for God’s sake” (House, 2001, p. 19). Vaughn (1982) observed that such intense identification with the ugliness of their condition taught Francis the meaning of life and led him to exhort his followers to “rejoice when (you) live among people (who are considered to be) of little worth and who are looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers and the beggars by the wayside” (Thomas of Celano, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, p. 19). Thomas of Celano wrote that in these most miserable of people, Francis could only see Christ, “whose noble image he wears, the image of him who made himself poor for us in the world” (as cited in Vaughn, 1982, p. 19).

The aesthetic of the ugly and the beautiful provide a paradoxical view of the contrast between St. Francis and much of the early 13th century church leadership. In speaking of some nearby flowers, Francis instructed his brethren about leadership thusly, “I beseech you, little brothers, that you be as wise as Brother Daisy and Brother Dandelion; for never do they lie awake thinking of tomorrow, yet they have gold crowns like kings and emperors or like Charlemagne in all his glory” (Chesterton, 1923, p. 137). While Francis and his followers appeared to experience spiritual purpose in donning rough, patched robes, and foregoing all power and position in society to minister among the most wretched, Francis would find himself with a remarkable influence upon the most powerful prelates in the church.

By embracing the ugliness of poverty and eschewing the beautiful adornments of this world, he became “a son and servant of God,” what Bekker (2008) has described as the Christological act of kenosis, or self-emptying. Vaughn (1982, p. 21) has described it as the “paradox of the life of Saint Francis.” Francis insisted that he was simply being obedient to scriptures, which Francis taught to his disciples as the way of “perfect obedience” (Vaughn, 1982, p. 27). In referencing the Gospel of Saint Luke, Francis wrote,

“The Lord says in the Gospel: ‘He who does not renounce everything he possess cannot be my disciple,’ and ‘He who wishes to save his life must lose it.’ That person leaves everything he possesses and loses his body who surrenders his whole self to obedience at the hands of his prelate (The Admonitions, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, p. 28).

The rough, submissive, and disciplined existence that Francis and his followers exemplified—a life that might have been aesthetically ugly to many—may be contrasted with the comfortable lives of the politically powerful and the wealthy, that might have seemed to many to be beautiful on the surface, but were ugly in their wanton emptiness. This striking contrast of aesthetics and values may help account for the many converts who readily gave up the privileges of their wealthy and successful backgrounds to follow him, including some of his closest disciples (House, 2000). Among his earliest followers were Bernard, who had

been a successful merchant, and Peter, who had an ecclesiastical and legal background (Spoto, 2002). That is, Francis' living enactment of the Gospel admonitions stood in stark contrast to the lives of many of the Christian clergy of his day. Historian Arnaldo Fortini quoted Pope Innocent III's view of the clergy in Francis' time:

Many priests have lived luxuriously. They have passed the time in drunken revels, neglecting religious rites. When they have been at Mass, they have chatted about commercial affairs... Many bishops have appropriated the income of a parish for themselves, leaving the parish indigent... They have made a scandalous commerce of relics. They have allowed the illegitimate children of a canon to succeed the father in the benefice (Innocent III, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, p. 52).

Yet Francis held his position in lowly humility, not choosing to see himself above his often corrupted prelates. In one account, Francis would remove a worm from the path where they were walking so that it might not be stepped on, and declare, "I am a worm and no man" (Maynard, 1948, p. 145.) Francis explained his self-deprecating references, so that his adherents might follow:

We must not be wise and prudent according to the flesh; rather we must be simple, humble and pure. And let us hold ourselves in contempt and scorn, vermin and worms, as the Lord says through the prophet: I am a worm and no man, the scorn of men and the outcast of the people (Psalms 21:7) We must never desire to be over others, rather we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God's sake.

This Worm of God grasped a sense of realities that ran deeper than the ugly superficialities that surrounded him. That which might have appeared beautiful on the surface of the predominant church was often ugly underneath, and that which was ugly amid the suffering of the poor was made beautiful. By leading his followers to personally embrace and experience this aesthetic, they discovered a spiritual life that was much deeper and greater than might have been rationally achieved.

The Comic

The aesthetic category of the Comic is defined as that which provokes laughter by playing off of ugliness and transforming it, often as a release from fear (Strati, 2000, p. 22). Humor "seeks to dispel social fictions by dramatizing their components" through the absurd, the paradoxical, the nonsensical and the satirical (p. 22). While one might be tempted to minimize the comic aesthetic in the seriousness of the organizational life, consider its ministerial power to tweak presumptions and persuade us to reconsider. Strati (2000) eloquently summarizes its ability to dispel "the repugnance provoked by ugliness and transform ugliness

into comedy, thereby evidencing its paltriness with respect to beauty” (p. 22). The comic aesthetic offered a powerful way for St. Francis to engage the stark realities of life and ministry in the early 13th century.

From his youth, Francis was known as someone whose easy optimism and merriment were often expressed in song and good times with his friends (Maynard, 1948). Following his conversion, Francis believed in preaching and singing, and did so with “a mixture of excitement and anguish, solemnity and humor...” (House, 2001, p. 78). Though Francis may have been described by some as a “clown” and “master of the revels” in his life before conversion (Maynard, 1948, p. 26), he would bring an entirely new meaning to being called “crazy” and foolish, by others. (Green, 1985, p. 80; Maynard, 1948, p. 38).

A story is told of Francis traveling from Assisi to Gubbio and choosing a path through the forests. As was common to his nature, Francis was singing. Thieves accosted him in the woods, ripped off his shirt and asked who he was. “I am the herald of the great King!” he exclaimed (Green, 1985, p. 83). His attackers laughed and threw Francis in a snowy ditch. The account says that after the would be thieves departed, Francis arose, burst out laughing and singing again (Green, 1985, p. 83). Joy often overtook Francis, and such an attack apparently had not dampened this minstrel’s spirits.

In begging for food, it is said that Francis and his follows sometimes made it “an occasion for gaiety” (Maynard, 1948, p. 119). Having conquered his own resistance to beg, Francis “had not forgotten the sweetness he had experienced...(and) he had managed to impart his spirit to others, so that sometimes those who had gone out in quest of alms made a kind of humorous contest of it and displayed at the end of the day, like so many trophies, their crusts and carrots and cabbage stumps” (Maynard, 1948, p. 119).

From his youth, Francis was a musician, a poet, a singer and a bit of a performer. He was often referred to as a troubadour, in deference to the rakish love poets and wandering minstrels of southern France whose popular cultural influence spread throughout the regions of France and Italy (Green, 1985; House, 2001; Chesterton, 1923; Engelbert, 1950; Spoto, 2002). When in his later ministry and poetry, Francis would refer to a gracious lady named Poverty, G.K. Cheston (1923) said he was using the troubador-influenced speech of his day.

Chesterton (1923) drew a distinction, however, that helps us to understand the contrasting comedy that Francis’ often employed in his language. In addition to the troubadours, there were the jongleurs, who Chesterton (1923, p. 77) described as “companions in arts.” The jongleur was “a jocolator or jester; sometimes he was what we should call a juggler...or tumbler” (Chesterton, 1923, p. 77). Typically, Chesterton (1923) explained, the troubadour would win the hearts of crowds with strains of romantic songs and sonnets, then the jongleur would enter as an act of comic relief.

Francis referred to himself and his band of followers as the “Jongleurs de Dieu,” or Jugglers of God (Chesterton, 1923, p. 74). As Chesterton (1923, p. 78) observed, Francis was constantly turning ideas and expectations “topsy-turvey.” Many people in Assisi regarded Francis as amiable, even foolish, in his ways, especially following his conversion (Chesterton, 1923); but there was seeming method in the madness of this fool for Christ that would woo hearts and upend lives for generations to come.

This troupe of Jonleurs displayed their joyful wit on many recorded occasions. Maynard (1948) relayed one story about Brother Giles, a peasant prior to joining Francis. Giles had been visiting with two cardinals of the church, who, at the end of their meeting, asked Giles to pray for them, to which he answered, “It is not necessary that I do that, my lords, for you have more faith and hope than I have.” When asked what led him to that conclusion, Giles replied, “Because you with all your power and place and honor hope to be saved, wehreas I, who live in poverty fear that in spite of it all I shall be damned” (Maynard, 1948, p. 155). It was such contrasting wit that often disarmed the listener and cracked the door on truth.

Francis’ joyful wit was often combined with a physicality and aesthetic of the senses that instructed the heart and soul, often in contrast to the logic of the mind. For example, after a day of begging, Francis and Masseo, one of his followers, had little to show for their efforts except for a few pieces of dry bread. Francis stretched himself out on a stone near a fountain and declared joyfully, “O Brother Masseo, we are not worthy of such as treasure!” (Maynard, 1948, p. 154). What treasure? Here, in the physical context of hunger with little to eat at the end of the day, Masseo exclaimed that he could find no treasure in this poor meal. Yet this was the aesthetic context for stirring Masseo’s senses to new lessons. Francis replied:

And this is what I count vast treasure, when there is nothing prepared by human hands, but all is given by God’s providence, in the bread we have and this fine table of stone and that clear fountain. So I will that we pray God to make us love with all our hearts the treasure of holy poverty He has given us, a treasure so rich that Our Lord himself accepted it (Maynard, 1948, p. 154).

Strati (2000, p. 22) argued that humor often “springs from reflection that seeks to dispel social fictions” by dramatizing them. Francis used such stark physicality as an opportunity to joyfully offer his disciples a contrasting spiritual lesson. It was a powerful aesthetic approach to changing hearts and perceptions that often characterized his leadership.

This Jongleur of Souls often used his own body as a means of delivering his lessons in both dramatic and comedic ways. Linstead (2000) defined such dramatics as a way of moving beyond an objective orientation to discovering truth. According to Linstead (2000, p. 76) aleatory knowledge is a serendipious path to discovering knowledge which resides outside oneself; mimetic knowledge is a dramatic knowledge that

reaches to understand the other through a mimicry of their behavior, and an ilinx, or revelatory experience that goes beyond the present (Linstead, 2000, p. 76). Even in the most comedic circumstances, Francis appeared to be seeking to evoke an aleatory and mimetic experience for himself and his followers, often using of his own body and the body of his followers as the media to engender the experience. Francis said that he deliberately used “to make a tongue of his body” (House, 2001, p. 111). Consider the demonstrative lesson offered at the start of his ministry.

By age 25, Francis had certainly been a source of disappointment to his father in that he had returned from the war, rejected the family business, and was now behaving in disturbing ways throughout the community (Green, 1985; Spoto, 2002). Francis had sold a horse and bales of cloth to earn money to be used in rebuilding the church at San Damiano without his father’s knowledge or consent. His father, Pietro Dernardone, had appealed to city fathers, and finally to the local bishop for justice (Spoto, 2002).

On a chilly March morning, a crowd gathered in the Piazza di Santa Maria Maggiore in Assisi where Bishop Guido would hear the case against Francis. Amid accusations of theft and dishonor, Francis’ demanded restitution and laid out his case before the bishop (Spoto, 2002).

Francis appeared cleaned and dressed in nice clothes obtained from his mother. His father presented his case. The bishop endeavored to resolve the matter by directing Francis to return the money and to depend on God for the work of the church (Spoto, 2002).

Yet, this was an opportunity for Francis to evoke the senses in his family, the bishop and the audience with a stark and dramatic new understanding. Francis addressed the bishop:

“My lord,” he said, raising his voice. “I will gladly give back to my father not only the money acquired from his things, but even my clothes.” With that, Francis slipped through a side door of the cathedral, only to appear moments later stark naked, standing before the bishop and holding out all his clothes, with a cash purse placed on top of them...

Francis now turned to the crowd, and said, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. Until now, I have called Peter Dernardone my father. But because I have proposed to serve God, I return to him the money on account of which he was so upset, and also all the clothing which is his, and I want only to say from now on, ‘Our Father, Who art in heaven,’ and not ‘My father, Peter Banardone’” (Spoto, 2002, pp. 53-54). “I shall go naked to meet the Lord” (Green, 1985, p. 83).

Such dramatic methods no doubt shocked the senses his audience. Spoto (2002) argued that it was not simply a matter of Francis’ public nudity, but that this young man was breaking completely with his family, their security and support. It was a physically displayed message that he was leaving one family and kingdom for an

eternal one, delivered in a manner that still reverberates as one of the most renowned story in the life of this startling saint.

There were many times to follow in which Francis used seemingly serendipitous dramatics to evoke his spiritual lessons in others, often in wild contrast to the rational sensibilities over everyone around him. On one occasion, to deliver a lesson on penance to one of his followers, he ordered Brother Rufino, who was a member of a respected Assisi family, to go to the cathedral there and preach, stripped to the waist and wearing only his breeches (Maynard, 1948).

He had second thoughts. Francis reportedly said to himself and others, “Why do you, the son of Peter Bernadino, wretch as you are, command Brother Ruffino, one of the nobles of Assisi, to exhibit himself like a madman? Go and do yourself what you order others to do” Maynard, 1948, pp. 119-120).

Francis therefore stripped from the waist and did likewise. Maynard (1948) found accounts that included having Francis led by a rope around his neck and had ashes thrown in his face while he preached that evening. Eventually, he had them led to a spot in town where criminals are hanged (Maynard, 1948). Townspeople jeered and declared them all madmen (Maynard, 1948). Nonetheless, this aesthetic leader led by example, and he found many similar opportunities to let his body preach a message that would be long remembered.

Such comic aesthetics may seem absurd, paradoxical, nonsensical and satirical in their demonstration (Strati, 2000). Nonetheless, these aesthetic acts may act to stir up images and recollections among those experiencing the moment, perhaps evoking feelings and surfacing understandings that otherwise might have remained sedately buried beneath the bonds of more limited and rational contemplations of faith.

The Picturesque and Agogic

In a similar manner, the picturesque and agogic categories are those imitative acts and experiences which evokes something else that we recognize and relate to, such as in the concept of play (Strati, 2000, p. 23). Milani (1991) describes this category as the invention of “as if” such as in the notion of fantasizing, projecting and game-playing (as cited in Strati, 2000, p. 24). Further, consider the agogic aesthetics of music, dance, movement and rhythm. What rhythms and tempo and routines around us evoke soothing feelings or disturbing ones? In the manner of the leader’s bearing and interaction, such picturesque aesthetics may give rise to powerfully positive and meaningful responses and recollections among others.

Consider Francis’ ways of eliciting aesthetically-learned lessons through playfulness. House (2001, p. 111) noted that “to express the importance of joy, he played an invisible fiddle with a stick; to demonstrate his view

of money he told one of his friars, who had just accepted some as alms, to take the coins in his mouth and drop them in a pile of dung.”

Thomas of Celano described Francis physically. According to the details provided in LeGoff (1999, p. 54), Francis was:

of medium height, almost short, with a round, medium sized head, a long face, a small, flat forehead, medium sized eyes, black and naïve, very dark hair, straight eyebrows, a small and rectilinear nose, straight but small ears, flat temples, well aligned teeth, regular and white, thin lips, a black beard, uneven hair, a thin neck, straight shoulders, short arms, small hands, tapering fingers, long fingernails, thin legs, smooth skin, and a lank body.

Francis may not have physically evoked the picturesque assurances of a knightly leader when he stood to speak (LeGoff, 1999). However, accounts of his preaching were that “his whole body seemed to preach, and his gestures were vivacious and, perhaps, violent” (Maynard, 1948, p. 133.) It was said that his “feet danced while he spoke” (p. 133).

Maynard (1948, p. 123) found testimony that Francis had a voice “so resonant that it was startling, coming from so frail a man.” Despite the lack of physical attributes and adorned only in a coarse and patched habit, Francis spoke from his heart in such a manner that it was “the personality of Francis” that was the real sermon, and “the power of his preaching was tremendous.”

House (2001, p. 11) found that because Francis was a poet, when he spoke, he painted images with his words, and he guided his friars to use “similies rather than abstractions” when they preached. He and his Troubadour brothers would sing as well as preach, often using Latin hymns and Italian songs (Maynard, 1948, p. 84). For Francis to express his prayers and inner thoughts in joyful song was normal (Vaughn, p. 37).

However, it was his use of poetry to convey his meaning that has drawn much attention through the centuries. For example, Francis’ *The Canticle of Brother Sun* (see Appendix B) was the earliest Medieval Italian poem to survive (House, 2001). The Canticle, written during the last period of his life, was also credited with inspiring Dante to pen *The Divine Comedy* in Italian (House, 2001). Francis himself was featured in 80 lines of Dante’s verse (House, 2001). Dante would later don the rough habit and join the Franciscan order (Maynard, 1948).

As Francis entered the final chapter of his life, he declared of the Canticle:

For his praise, I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord’s creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its creator” (Vaughn, 1982, p. 37-38).

Indeed, his gentle ballad fully personified his harmonious and humble demeanor toward God, man and nature that has become his trademark. After it was written, he insisted that a band of friars travel the countryside to present its message in song, and announce, “We are the Lords minstrels and you can repay us for our performance by leading a life of penance” (House, 2001, p. 269).

These lyrics were, therefore, not simply for the amusement of his audiences. Embedded within these lyrical expressions, Francis constructed meaning for listeners in the natural imagery, and then builds a bridge of reconciliation to invite quarreling factions around Assisi to experience similar harmony with God (Vaughn, 1982; G. K. Chesterton, 1923). Francis’ genuine strength of aesthetic leadership is perceived when the reader or hearer dwells on the primal and peaceful images evoked in the Canticles. It strikes at the senses and remind us of a higher truth about the nature of man before God. Vaughn (1982, p. 20) described the aesthetic process in these terms; that “there emerges, through the various adjectives that he uses, a description of the Christ-like attitudes that must be assumed before the human person can achieve the blessedness of this mystical vision.” The Canticle’s true meaning is experienced when it raises the listeners above the din of their own quarreling rational arguments to connect them with God in ways that only truth-within-art can deliver.

The Gracious

The Gracious aesthetic relates to “the visual and aural pleasure that is aroused by people and things,” including things that one might consider lovely, charming, pleasant, elegant, or engendering a sense of gentleness (Strati, 2000, p. 23). Actions that spring from spontaneity and virtue lead to a sense of graciousness (Strati, 2000). In organizational terms, elegance might evoke a wonder in the sense of style and precision of a thing, such as work well performed, the magic of a well-reasoned argument, or the thoughtfulness of a simple and kind act (Strati, 2000). How might a leader engender emotions that are sweet, or responses that surprise, enchant or endear? The ministry of St. Francis provides memorable examples of the aesthetic of grace enacted.

G. K. Chesterton (1923) said of Francis that “He was born kind...” Chesterton (1923) said, “A certain precipitancy was the very poise of his soul” (p. 45). Whether chasing after a beggar in the marketplace to give him alms or caring for lepers, “nearly all of the errands he ran on were errands of mercy...” Chesterton, 1923, p. 45).

To discover the radical meaning making within this aesthetic of graciousness, consider how Francis dealt with a band of robbers in the woods. While traveling near Monte Casale, three bandits came to a place

where Francis and his flock were staying and demanding food (Maynard, 1948; Englebert, 1950). A guardian at the gate where they were staying, Brother Angelo Tarlati, rebuked the bandits and sent them away.

When Francis discovered what had happened, he rebuked the guardian, saying, “sinners are brought back to God better by kindness than by cruel reproofs...” (Engelbert, 1950, p. 121). He sent the guardian carrying bread and wine to find the would-be robbers in the woods and to give it to them. Further, he was instructed to set a cloth upon the ground and serve them. Following the meal, he was to humbly ask them not to do violence to others.

On the second day, Tartali was sent with eggs and cheese to serve the brigands again. He would ask them, “Why do you live so hard and do so many evil things? For these you will lose your souls unless you are converted to God and serve the Lord” (Maynard, 1948, p. 138). Days later, all three of the three bandits would seek to join Francis’ order (Maynard, 1948). By enacting humility and graciousness, not simply speaking about it, Francis was showing his disciples how to reach and touch a man’s soul.

The Tragic

According to Strati (2000) The Tragic emerges “from the impermanence of human happiness, from fear of the unknown and the apparently inevitable” and dwells in one’s inner response to a sense of unexpected events that disrupt the order that we seek in life around us. Aristotle described tragedy’s role as an aesthetic that produced catharsis, purges one’s emotions of pity and fear, celebrates good’s triumph over evil, and often elicits the sense of the heroic figure (Strati, 2000, p. 24). The aesthetic responses to leaders who engage a tragic-heroic aesthetic can have powerful, revolutionary consequences.

Francis grew up dreaming of becoming a heroic knight (House, 2001). Yet in his latter years, this self-identified “knight of Christ” would face tragic circumstances with the aesthetics that had governed his life (Maynard, 1948, p. 65). It is perhaps predictable in some ways that a man who sought in every way to imitate Christ, would also face physical pain and anguish at the end of his life, and become a “man of sorrows” reflecting as a mirror the experiences of Christ (Chesterton, 1923, p. 13).

Throughout his life, Francis had used his own body as “a tongue” by which he would communicate in aesthetic ways that had dramatic effects upon his audiences. Perhaps that is why, in hindsight, the story of Francis receiving the stigmata, or marks of Christ, on his body, is a fitting development near the end of his life’s journey. In August, 1224, Francis and only four of his closest followers made the journey to La Verna, his mountain hermitage (Maynard, 1948).

In Maynard's (1948) account, Francis was tired and ill, and needed the assistance of a donkey to complete the journey. He finally withdrew from his brethren and allowed only his close friend, Leo, to check on him while he went into solitude to pray during this season of Lent. Without elaborating on the detailed accounts, Francis reported that he had had an intimate encounter with God that had confirmed their holy calling to obedience, poverty, and chastity. In evidence, Francis would later recount that he had asked God for the marks of Jesus upon his body (Maynard, 1948, p. 229). Maynard's account is descriptive:

When he came to himself he became conscious of something extraordinary having happened to him. He looked at his feet and hands ; they appeared to be pierced with nails, the heads of which were in his palms and insteps. Where the points came out on the other side, they were bent over; his finger could be slipped in as into a ring. But the nails seemed to be formed of his own blackened flesh.

He put his hand to his side. From it there came a slow trickle of blood. When he tried to walk he could not put the soles of his feet to the ground (Maynard, 1948, p. 230).

During the remaining two years of his life, stories of the stigmata spread. The religious significance was extreme and dramatic, yet certainly in keeping with one of the most dramatic evangelists in history who sought to imitate Christ in all of his sufferings. According to Spoto (2002) there were those who believed and those who didn't, then and now. Only those closest to him would testify to seeing the wounds. The earliest written source was in the testimony of Brother Elias to Pope Gregory IX, written immediately after Francis' death in 1226. Elias testified to the five wounds in detail (Spoto, 2002). Was the stigmata real or imagined, a divine gift or self-inflicted during spiritual ecstasy? Attempts at explaining away evidence of the stigmata included diagnoses that he had suffered from a form of leprosy from his many years of personal service in that community (Spoto, 2002) . Nonetheless, one account said that Francis had relayed that,

Divine Providence had shown the vision in this form (the stigmata) in order that he might understand that it was not by the martyrdom of the body but by the enkindling of the mind that he must be wholly transformed into the image of Christ crucified (Maynard, 1948, pp. 229-230).

In the end, the aesthetic impact upon his followers was not one that was not dulled by rational religious debates. Rather, it was an image and message that ignited faith; the inspirational wounding of this heroic servant that signaled the way for others to follow in Christ's footsteps and carry His message to the world.

Francis bore these wounds and other illnesses in typical humility. For example, he was slowly losing his eyesight from disease (House, 2001). In Green's (1985) account, Cardinal Ugolino ordered Francis to undergo treatment by the pope's own ophthalmologist in what was ultimately a crude, painful and unsuccessful

treatment. As the alleged cure for Francis' failing eyesight, the doctor heated a cauterizing iron metal and prepared to burn both of Francis' temples, from the top of his ears to his eyebrows. Just before the burning, Francis addressed the flame that would singe him:

My brother Fire, the Most High has given you a splendor that all creatures envy. Show yourself now to be kind and courtesou to me. For a long time I have loved you. I pray our Creator who made you, to temper your heat now, so that I may bear it" (Spoto, 2002, p. 205; Green, 1985, p. 261.)

In Green's (1985, p. 261) account, all but one of his followers had slipped from the room, not wanting to watch. When they returned, Francis chided them in laughter, "Cowards? Poltroon! Listen, I didn't feel a thing!" Then, turning to the doctor with equal humor, "if its not cooked enough, you may begin again!"

Once again, amid the aesthetic sights and sounds of his own burning flesh, Francis had used the occasion, through his prayer, his own body, and his humor to reveal a greater reality, and in doing so, incite others to follow his example.

The Sacred

The Sacred aesthetic underscores that "the reality and the fiction of human experience are not rationally distinct" (Strati, 2000, p.24). Dreams, premonitions, the unsayable, the unseeable each define this often spiritual response to sacredness. It may be found in the reverence and worship that is often a response when "the representation of the invisible" is made tangible through the "features of divinity" (Strati, 2000, p. 25). Strati (2000) notes that the sacred evokes the marvelous, unusual, irresistible, memorable and the inexplicable (p. 25). What symbolic meaning is attached to acts and places and things that elicit such responses, and how is a leader both shaped, connected and identified by these experiences with the sacred aesthetic?

Certainly, Francis assembled many images on his unique stage to lead and communicate his ministry. Mystical dreams, a Byzantine cross, birds and animals, thieves and popes, and finally, the stigmata itself, all seemingly took their turns on the stage of Francis' life (House, 2001). Yet it was his undaunted character, faith and ability to create these aesthetic experiences and connect them with others that reified these moments in the lives of so many others.

In his final days, Francis penned his final refrains. In it, he greeted Sister Death as he greeted Brother Fire. Francis was not pantheist (Chesterton, 1923) Yet it was in these metaphors, that he deposited the sacred and invited his listeners to embrace it:

Be praised, ym Lord, through our sister, the Death of the Body,
 from whom no living man escapes.
 Woe to them who die in mortal sin,
 But blessed are they who do your holiest will,
 For them the second death shall never harm.
 Praise and bless our Lord, and give him thanks,
 And serve him with great humility. (House 2001, p. 279)

For some, understanding the contrast of a joyful song about death, about laughter in the face of suffering, are things not easily grasped by the mind. Perhaps that is why Francis chose an aesthetic path to communicate the sacred in ways that would move off the pages of scripture and into the lives of those whose hearts were ready to follow him.

Consider the paradox of what Francis considered true joy. One account relayed by story and published in the 14th century, describes a conversation between Francis and Brother Leo on what is true joy. In Vaughn (1982, p. 165) Francis answers in a way that first challenges the expectations of his listeners, and then he challenges their hearts:

A messenger comes and says that all the masters in Paris have come to the order; write: this is not true joy. Or that all the prelates beyond the mountains have entered the Order, as well as the archbishops and bishops; or, that the king of France and the king of England have entered the Order; write: this is not true joy.

Again, that my brothers have gone to the nonbelievers and converted all of them to the faith; again, that I have so much grace of God that I heal the sick and perform great miracles: I tell you that true joy does not consist in any of these things.”

What then is true joy?

I return from Perugia and arrive here in the dead of night; and it is winter time, muddy and so cold that icicles have formed on the edges of my habit and keep striking my legs, and blood flows from such wounds. And all covered with mud and cold, I come to the gate and after I have knocked and called for sometime, a brother comes and asks, “Who are you?” I answer: “Brother Francis.” And he says: “go away; this is not a proper hour for going about; you may not come in.” And when I insist, he answers:

“Go away, you are a simple and stupid person; we are so many and we have no need of you. You are certainly not coming to us at this hour!” And I stand again at the door and say: “For the love of God, take me in tonight.” And he answers: “I will not. Go to the Crosiers place and ask there.”

I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, there would be true joy in this and true virtue and the salvation of the soul (Vaughn, 1982, pp. 165-166).

Francis, the Troubadour and Jongleur of Heaven, he played a sacred tune upon the instrument of his own body and soul, and invited others to dance with him. In doing so, his followers would experience a profound change in themselves, evidenced by the music of joy, the rhythms of virtue and the eternal harmonies of salvation in their own lives and the lives of others.

Francis and Aesthetic Leadership

Francis' approach to leadership came from his fundamental orientation that while he was still residing in this world, his heart, mind and spirit were set firmly to conquer its appeals (as Jesus declared in John 16:33). Prior to leaving for the Near East where Francis believed he may be martyred, he wrote of his simple framework for life in The Earlier Rule, XXII, where he wrote “And now that we have left the world, we have nothing else to do except to follow the will of the Lord and to please Him” (Vaughn, 1982, p. 13). All things appeared to be measured against this principle. Therefore, it appears that he found that an aesthetic approach to leadership enabled him to bridge the chasm between earth and heaven in men's hearts in ways that the prevailing logics of this world could not.

Consider, for instance, how he approached leadership in works of service. In his Rule of the Friars Minor, Francis wrote:

None of the brothers should be administrators or managers in whatever places they are staying among others to serve or to work, nor should they be supervisors in the houses in which they serve; nor should they accept any office which might generate scandal or be harmful to their souls. Instead they should be the lesser ones and subject to all who are in the same house (Vaughn, 1982, p. 115).

Herein lies another paradox of Francis on leadership (Bekker, 2008). One might be tempted to draw from this rule that Francis was against exercising leadership. Francis himself refused to act as the group's leader on journeys, he was never ordained, and only later in his ministry would he agree to take on shared formal authority within his order (House, 2001). However, Francis may have been pointing his followers along a different path of extending leadership influence that was radically different than the exercise of power found in much of church leadership (Bekker, 2008).

Indeed, Francis was unafraid of addressing the leaders of his day. Only two short years after his conversion, Francis and his followers traveled to Rome with the intention of seeing the Pope and getting his blessing upon their order and its simple rule. House (2001, p. 89) described Francis' "presumption in approaching the pope as extraordinary." Engelbert (1950, p. 93) described an "extremely cool" reception for Francis and his unkept band of monks.

There are a variety of versions of Francis' first encounter with Pope Innocent III; parts of two of those stories are offered here (House, 2001; Engelbert, 1950). It is agreed that Francis entered the Palace of the Lateran and eventually succeeded in reaching the Pope. But his appearance was poor that Innocent III treated him as a pig herder (Engelbert, 1950). Engelbert's (1950, p. 93) account is succinct in describing Francis' dramatic response:

"Do not bother me with your rule," said he. "Go and find your pigs and preach to them all the sermons you will." Francis did not wait for him to repeat what he said; he ran to a pigsty, and there daubed himself with muck and reappeared before the pope: Lord, said he, now that I have done what you commanded, have in your turn the kindness to accord me what I solicit."

Francis got his audience (after washing) and eventual support for his rule. A more mystical account recorded that before the papal encounter, Francis had experienced a dream in which a "tall and stately tree had bent down to him" (House, 2001, p. 95). Francis took that as the promise of a favorable outcome for his request before the pope (House, 2001). The more surprising element in this account is that the pope always was given a dream of the Lateran basilica shaking and threatening to collapse, only to be rescued and held up by a man. As the Pope conversed with Francis, he suddenly realized that the man in his dreams was now standing in front of him (House, 2001).

How does one account for mystical dreams in leadership? Certainly not by replicable logic, theory or traditional leadership methods. Nonetheless, a mystical Francis demonstrated the working out of his aesthetic leadership in very practical terms. By virtue of Francis' dramatic obedience to pray and to humble himself, even humiliate himself, he elicited kindness and cooperation. The sacred which often arises in aesthetic leadership does not often lend itself to complete and satisfying explanations to those who do not experience it; yet the weight of its felt reality and impact may reverberate widely.

Francis addressed the leaders of this world in the bold as if he were the herald of the next, having already "departed from this world" (Testament of Francis, as cited by Vaughn 1982, p. 54). For example, in stark and contrasting terms and images, he wrote *A letter to the Rulers of the People*, in which he addressed "mayors and consuls, magistrates and rulers throughout the world," describing himself only as "your little and

despicable servant.” He wishes them “health and peace” in one sentence, then warns them to “pause and reflect, for the day of death is approaching.” He challenges them to have a town crier every evening signal that praise and thanksgiving should be given to God by all people, and, if the leaders did not do this, that they should expect to “render an account before the Lord your God, Jesus Christ, on the day of judgment” (Vaughn, 1982, pp. 77-78).

Francis had not abandoned leadership per se, only of leadership in the manner of this world--a world that he and his disciples had already departed (Vaughn 1982; House, 2001). Yet his posture of leadership was most practical in its humility. In a letter to his followers, Francis explained that, in keeping with the teachings of Saint Luke, that “the one to whom obedience has been entrusted and who is esteemed as greater should be the lesser and the servant of the other brothers” (Vaughn, 1982, p. 70). Such aesthetic approaches disarmed prelates and bandits alike. Francis demonstrated to them the path to a more joyful way of life, despite the brutality of the early 13th century. For those who followed him, Francis showed them how to walk “in the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and led them into an experience with God that would change their hearts and their lives forever (Francis, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, p. 109).

Further Research

This paper did not endeavor to capture a full integration of the writings of St. Francis with the aesthetic categories suggested by Strati (2000). As evident in the research delineated at the opening of this paper, aesthetics in leadership is an emerging area that offers significant opportunity for more qualitative research. However, this narrative comparative sampling does open questions about how a contemporary leader might actually enact changes within followers, aside from the more didactic exchanges and a general discussion of values.

How might one explore the boundaries of art and aesthetics in leadership in comprehensible, credible and qualitative ways that do not conform to the more structured approaches of traditional social science? Are the spiritual, emotional, and values structures of followers relevant to constructing a leader’s effectiveness? How does aesthetic leadership compare and contrast with contemporary theories of leadership that recognize authenticity, inspiration, transformation and spirituality as a component of leadership praxis? What contemporary case studies might offer insights into the nature of aesthetic leadership?

Aesthetic leadership holds promise as a field of study alongside more logical and rational leadership methodologies. As the field of leadership emerges from the limitations of the Enlightenment to embrace many less logical ways of knowing, as suggested by Vico (1935) and Baumgarten (1925, 1935) then research into

aesthetics may yield significant fruits toward the development of a more holistic understanding of the social constructions and individual interactions which result in influence, with outcomes that we call leadership.

About the Author

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Appendix A

Salutation of the Virtues

Hail, Queen Wisdom, may the Lord protect You,
with your sister, holy pure Simplicity.

Lady, holy Poverty, may the Lord protect You,
with your sister, holy Humility!

Lady, holy Charity, may the Lord protect You,
with your sister, holy Obedience.

O most holy Virtues, may the Lord protect all of You
from Whom You come and proceed.

There is surely no one in the entire world who can possess any one of You
unless he dies first.

Whoever possesses one (of you) and does not offend the others
possesses all.

And whoever offends one (of you) does not possess any
and offends all.

And each one destroys vices and sins.

Holy Wisdom destroys Satan and all his subtlety.

Pure holy Simplicity destroys all the wisdom of this world
and the wisdom of the body.

Holy Poverty destroys the desire for riches, and avarice,
and the cares of this world.

Holy Humility destroys pride, and all people who are in the world
and all things that belong to the world.

Holy Charity destroys every temptation of the devil and the flesh
and every carnal fear.

Holy Obedience destroys every wish of the body and the flesh
and binds its mortified body to obedience of the Spirit
and obedience to one's brother,
and (the person who possesses her) is subject and submissive

to all persons in the world,

and not to man only

But even to all beasts and wild animals

So that they may do whatever they want with him

Inasmuch as it has been given to them from above by the Lord.

(The Salutation of the Virtues, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, pp. 150-151)

Appendix B

The Canticle of Brother Sun

Most High, all powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing. To you alone, Most High, do they belong, and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, Who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars; in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water; which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you light the night. And he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love and bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no living man can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks and serve him with great humility.

(Francis, as cited in Vaughn, 1982, p. 38)

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