

Bernard Forthomme. *Par excès d'amour. Les stigmates de François d'Assise.*

Bernard Forthomme is a friend with whom I am in regular communication. For the past four or five years he has also been sending me the books he has been writing. He is very prolific and erudite with an extensive knowledge of the Christian tradition and postmodern sensitivities. Having read many of his books loaded with sentences multi-laced with over-lapping layers of meaning—thus not of facile access, (e.g. *De l'acédie monastique à l'anxiodépression*) I had my doubts that Bernard could come up with a book that could reach a popular audience. I knew about the publication of *Par excès d'amour* I was pleasantly surprised to read that he did pull it off: come up with a book that an average audience could read and profit by.

The stigmata of St. Francis has been the subject of hot debate in recent scholarly circles ever since the publication of Chiara Frugoni's *Framcesco e l'invenzione delle stimmat.eUna storia per immagini e parole fino a Giotto ed a Bonaventura* in 1993. In this ground breaking book, which unfortunately has not been translated into English, Frugoni, through an extensive study of the iconography surrounding the event, challenges the assumption that the stigmata were real and advances the opinion that they were largely the theological concoction of Bonaventure and spread through the picturing of Giotto, subsequent paintings and propaganda. This challenge was picked up by many of the most important contemporary Franciscan scholars who, while accepting many of Frugoni's observations, nonetheless, reestablished the fact of the stigmata. This debate continues and will be picked up this coming May at the International Congress of Medieval Studies(Kalamazoo, MI) with two sessions (three papers per session) dedicated to Francis's stigmata. And from a very different angle, interest on the stigmata has been generated by the Padre Pio phenomenon, recent books about him, and television programs on the tradition of the stigmata of, to be sure, uneven value.

Forthomme's short book is a marvel. It cuts through the scholarly intricacies of the above discussion and pithily makes its essential findings available. But more than that with the plethora of books on Francis currently on the market, his insights on who Francis was, the meaning of his life and

its culminating event the stigmata are strikingly new and not to be found anywhere else in my acquaintance. Moreover, Forthomme's insights resonate deeply with contemporary postmodern sensitivities without, once again, getting lost in its jargon particular those of French emanation which would likely make it opaque to an English speaking and largely American audience. The stigmata of Francis is not only a recent controversial topic, as it was also immediately after his death, it sparked commentary throughout the Christian mystical tradition. Another feature of Forthomme's book is that he sprinkles his study with succinct references to some of these commentaries, e.g., Francis of Sales, John of the Cross. To illustrate and highlight its presentation, the book is also handsomely illustrated with several examples from the iconographic tradition surrounding the stigmata

St. Anthony Messenger Press would render a great service to the Franciscan and postmodern world we live in by publishing *Par excès d'amour Les stigmates de François d'Assise*.

Further observations are included in my response to your evaluation form

(P.L., Chicago)