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1

Editorial

The Remarkable Origins of Third Order Regular Rule and Life
Sister Nancy Celaschi, osf 3

Called to Heal : Inter-religious Dialogue in the TOR Tradition
Sister Margaret Carney, osf 10

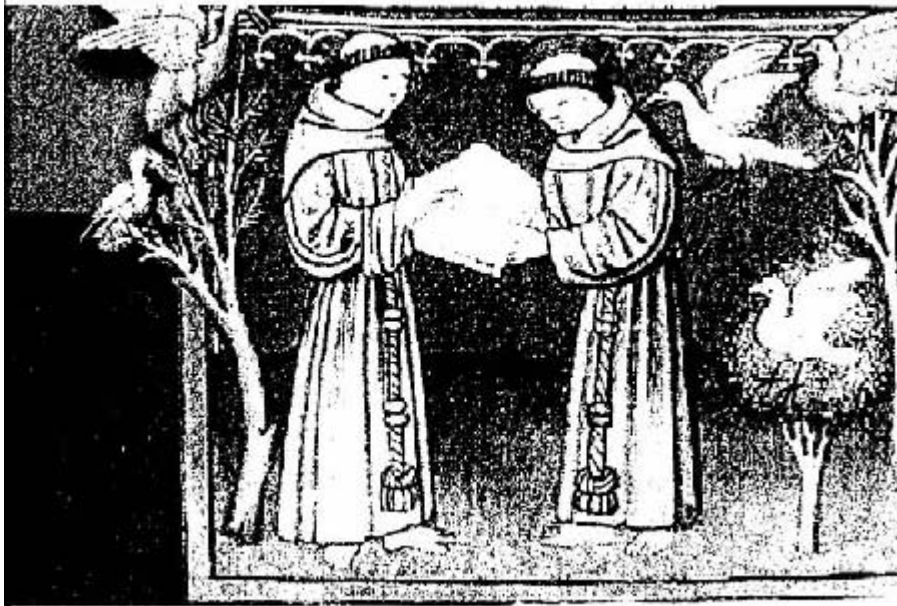
Interrreligious Dialogue and Religious Life
Fr.Elias D. Mallon, SA 16

The Latin American Ecology and the Franciscan World View
Professor Ricardo Antonio Rodriguez 20

A Call to be Peacemakers: Franciscan Life in Mission
Sister Violet Grennan, mfic 28

Franciscan Clarist Congregation among the poor in Kenya
Sister Mello, fcc 33

The Relevance of Franciscan Spirituality in the Future:
New ways of living the Franciscan Spirituality
(Collective Article)
Sr. Maria Stella Carta, Tibor kauser,
Bro.Xavier Anthony 38



The form of life of the Brothers and Sisters is this:
to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus
Christ, living in Obedience, in Poverty and in Chastity.
(TOR Rule,1)

BREVE PONTIFICIUM

Franciscanum vitae propositum

Ioannes Paulus PP. II

Ad perpetuam rei memoriam

Franciscanum vitae propositum nostra quidem aetate, haud secus ac superiore tempore, complures viros et mulieres evangelicam sitiennes perfectionem Regnumque Dei appetentes sine intermissione allicit. Ad Sancti Francisci Assisiensis exemplar adhaerentes Sodales Tertii Ordinis Regularis sectari ipsum contendunt Iesum Christum, dum fraterno vivunt in consortio, evangelica consilia oboedientiae, paupertatis, castitatis votis publicis observando suscipiunt et in varii generis operositatem apostolicam incumbunt. Quo perfectius suae vitae propositum exsequantur, assidue orationis usum frequentant, germanam inter se excolunt caritatem atque vera utuntur paenitentia et abnegatione christiana. Cum autem hae singulae Franciscalis vitae propositi partes ac rationes luculenter in "*Regula et Vita Fratrum et Sororum Tertii Ordinis Regularis Sancti Francisci*" comprehendantur cumque prorsus ita descriptae convenient vero Franciscali instituto, Nos pro apostolicae potestatis Nostrae plenitudine statuimus, edicimus, decernimus ut haec *Regula* propriam habeat vim momentumque ad genuinae Franciscalis vitae sensum Fratribus et Sororibus explanandum, usquequaque videlicet perpensis iis omnibus quae de hac re iam suo tempore edixerant Decessores Nostri Leo Decimus et Pius Undecimus Constitutionibus Apostolicis "*Inter cetera*" et "*Rerum condicio*". Quoniam novimus quanta diligentia curaque haec "*Regula et Vita*" cursum renovatae accomodationis perfecit quamque feliciter ad optatam consensionis metam pervenerit communibus ex disceptationibus et inquisitionibus votis et elucubrationibus, idcirco fore certi confidimus ut propositos fructus effectusque renovationis adfatim in posterum consequatur tempus. Haec autem voluntatis Nostrae significatio praecipimus ut firma usque sit virtutemque exserat

suam tam nunc quam posthac, contrariis quibuslibet rebus minime obsistentibus.

Datum Romae, apud Sanctum Petrum, sub anulo Piscatoris, die VIII mensis Decembris, anno Domini MCMLXXXII, Pontificatus Nostri quinto.

Augustinus Card. Casaroli
a publicis Ecclesiae negotiis

Editorial

Following Vatican II, the Church invites all religious congregations to undergo a radical renewal of religious life. So they began to return to the authentic sources, to the Gospel and to the spirit of the founder. The Council Documents, especially the Constitution Lumen Gentium and the Decree Perfectae Caritatis seemed to encourage these demands. The Third Order Regular of St. Francis also began to think about the inadequacy of their Rule promulgated by Pope Pius XI in 1927. The relentless effort of the Brothers and Sisters of the TOR have seen the light in December 8th 1982, when Pope John Paul II approved the "Rule and Life". They realized their special role in the Church in establishing the Reign of God by their witnessing.

We dedicated the last issue of *Propositum* as a preparation for the 800th birth anniversary of St. Elizabeth of Hungary on 17th Nov, 2007. This year our attention calls to another important event, the 25th anniversary of the approval of the "Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis". The Jubilee year invites us to reflect and evaluate the past years and look forward with new dreams to revitalize our Third Order Regular Franciscan Charism. God has showered upon us innumerable graces through the person of St. Francis and his instructions mainly through the values of Conversion, Contemplation, Poverty and Minority. We are specially called to live the Rule according to its spirit, to walk in faith and gratitude, to establish solidarity and peace among ourselves, in our Franciscan Families, the whole world and especially the poor and the needy. Our presence in the world must offer new life, meaning, encouragement and hope to all.

In the first article of this issue, sister Nancy Celaski, OSF, focuses the remarkable origins of TOR Rule and Life and she leads us to look back at the journey made by our forebears throughout the centuries as well as the process that involved our own generation. Sister Margaret Carney, OSF, reflects Inter-religious Dialogue in terms of the TOR Tradition and focusing the values of Conversion, Contemplation, Minority and Poverty. She thinks that it is a call to heal. Father Elias D. Mallon, SA reflects on Inter-religious Dialogue and Religious Life. He is convinced that Dialogue is part of the witness which religious and all Christians give to the boundless love of Christ. In the view of Sister Violet Grennan, MFIC, the call to be peacemakers in our world is a life-long journey to become the embodiment of peace and it begins with the self. We are pleased to bring you the study and reflection of Professor Ricardo Antonio Rodrigues on The Latin American Ecology and the Franciscan World View. According to him the mysticism of creation, based on Franciscan Spirituality, can lead us to self sustainability in a new and wise way. Sister Mello, FCC, offers a picture of the selfless and joyful service of the Franciscan Clarist Sisters among the neglected, uncared, uneducated poor people in Kenya. Here we have a collective article shared by Sister Maria Stella Carta, SSM, Tibor Kauser, SFO, and Brother Xavier Antony, CMSF. Each of them reflected on the relevance of Franciscan Spirituality in the Future and they suggested some new ways to live it.

My sincere gratitude to all the contributors who provide material for *Propositum*.

Peace and all good

The Remarkable Origins of Third Order Regular Rule and Life

Sister. Nancy Celaschi, OSF

As we prepare to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, we do well to look back at the journey made by our forebears throughout the centuries as well as the process that involved our own generation just a few years ago. Just as the Third Order Regular is probably unique in the history of religious life, so too is our Rule and Life.

The Second Vatican Council asked religious to renew and update their form of life; they were to do so by a return to the original charism of their religious institute and to adapt their lifestyle to the needs of today's church and world. Everyone entered into this process, some reluctantly, some with more enthusiasm than others. The religious of the Third Order Regular, men and women alike, joined in the process.

Most congregations of our order did the historical research that took them back a few centuries to that founding charism. It was a time of great discovery as the figures of remarkable men and women emerged from the shadows or even from total anonymity. Each of these figures, however, had been inspired by Francis of Assisi, and a certain understanding of Franciscan spirituality that was also conditioned by the social and ecclesial context in which he or she lived. Third Order Regular Franciscans, therefore, were faced with the need to rediscover, in some way, two founding charisms, that of their own congregation and that of the Franciscan movement to which they belonged.

Further complicating matters was the then-existing Rule of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, which had been approved in 1927 for the express purpose of providing a Rule that allowed for the changes in religious life that had been incorporated into the 1917 Code of Canon Law. As we read in the introduction, "It became necessary to accommodate the law of Pope Leo X to our times and to the more recent decrees of the church, so that the Regular Tertiaries and the very many other religious families of simple vows which have taken the spirit of Francis as their foundation, use the Franciscan name and recognize Saint Francis as their father, might continue to merit from the Church and the State laudable recognition of their works. This Code, for example, for the first time officially sanctioned and regulated the life of a category known as "religious" in apostolic congregations. These religious, both men and women, would make perpetual simple vows, retaining the right to own property a right, incidentally, which they could not renounce.

The 1927 Rule, however, had replaced the Rule of Leo X, approved in 1521. In the introduction to that document we read that the purpose of the "new" Rule was to adapt the life of the Third Order Regular to the reforms enacted by the Fifth Lateran Council.

The Rule of Leo X, however, was the first Rule actually destined only for the religious of the Third Order. For these religious alone it replaced the 1289 Rule of Nicholas IV, Jerome of Ascoli, the first Franciscan Pope and former Minister General of the friars.. This Rule was basically a modification of the *Memoriale Propositi* of 1221 and continued to serve for all the brothers and sisters of the Order of Penance, that is, for the seculars as well as for groups already at that time living in community. What would become the Secular Franciscan Order in our day continued to follow the Rule of Nicholas IV until the days of Vatican II.

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration in our brief study is the great strides made in Franciscan Studies in the 19th and 20th centuries. The scientific research in the libraries and manuscript collections throughout Europe had given the Franciscan world a number of texts that had been intellectual movement. The discovery of texts that are now well-known to us, such as the *Legend of Perugia*, the works of Thomas of Celano and the *Mirror of Perfection*, to name but a few, had begun to challenge some

of the lasting images of St. Francis popularized by Bonaventure or the Fioretti. When critical editions of these works were published and the techniques of Biblical scholarship applied to the Franciscan texts, new concepts began to emerge. At the same time historians also afforded us a better understanding of the Middle Ages in general and life in Assisi in Francis' day in particular.

So our brothers and sisters of the 1970s who were faced with the task of rewriting their Constitutions and adapting their lifestyle to that original charism had been exposed to a totally new and different understanding of that charism. Many of them expressed the desire for a new Rule to replace that of Pius XI, one which better expressed that founding charism and Francis's understanding of a Rule and Life. So various groups of Franciscan tertiary religious began to draft a new rule, some individually and some in intercongregational groups at the regional or national level.

The "real fun" began when the various groups began to talk about submitting their "Rule" texts for ecclesiastical approval. Discrete inquiries soon let everyone realize that the Church's universal magisterium would not look favorably on a whole range of documents for a group that was supposed to be a single Order within the Catholic Church. Added to this is the fact that some of these groups with specific rule texts included the leadership of international congregations, the resulting mix of different T.O.R. rule texts in a single geographic area would further impact unfavorably on this unity. Those making the inquiries were encouraged to come up with a single text that could be submitted in the name of the whole Third Order Regular and it might be received favorably in Rome. To some of us it seemed an impossible task, a request perhaps inspired by a fable from the Brothers Grimm or the heroic trials of Greek mythology.

Where there's a will, there's a way, they say, and there certainly was a will. The energy that was being poured into the adaptation and renewal of religious life was also devoted to what would become known as the "Rule Project." Of further assistance was the fact that major superiors had organized themselves into national and international conferences and for the first time it was easier to communicate across borders and oceans. The major superiors who agreed to spearhead the effort faced a dauntless task, but they were undaunted. They created a structure with three levels, the International Franciscan Bureau (the B.F.I., consisting of major superiors representing the various parts of the world), the International Franciscan Commission (the C.F.I. representing leaders of various national or regional interfranciscan groups) and the Work Group, brothers and sisters with some compelling interest and some background in the field, who were charged with drafting the text. They were asked to prepare a new text and not to advance any of the texts that had been made already. It was also decided at this time that, in order to be as "timeless" as possible, the new text should be based primarily on the writings of St. Francis himself, in the hopes that future generations faced with adaptation would be able to find in the words of Francis the inspiration they needed as well.

A first international consultation revealed that there were four elements that were considered essential to our Franciscan way of life, even though some of these elements were named differently by various groups: These four essential elements were penance or metanoia, prayer or contemplation, humility or minority and poverty. These elements would constitute the weight-bearing pillars of the new rule, and the construction material would be the writings of Francis and the earliest generation of Franciscans.

The Work Group met twice, in Reute, Germany and in Brussels, Belgium; after each working session they were joined by members of the BFI, to whom they presented their work. These drafts were then circulated among the conversations and national organizations for consultation with the membership. We read that the first draft was circulated to 205 congregations, 16 provinces of international congregations and the research committees of two federations. Responses came in 10 languages from thirty countries. 105 congregations gave their total approval of the text, a number suggested changes and only a few rejected the text. The text was ultimately presented to the major superiors for formal approval during a General Assembly in Rome in 1981 and was accepted with no dissenting votes. As an aside, we should also note that this assembly also agreed to continue the process begun to create the Rule and Life by laying the foundation for what was to become the International Conference of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, the IFC-TOR.

Since the Rule and Life was written, as much as possible, in the words of St. Francis there was no specific chapter on chastity, something that caused an undercurrent of tension even during the Rome Assembly. It should be noted that one of the major insights of Vatican II's theology of religious life was that the identifying element and central vow for religious is "chastity for the sake of the Kingdom." Those

charged with getting the official approval of the Rule and Life decided that it would be best to have a chapter on poverty, and had to be written by a different hand. This chapter, which also mentions the Blessed Virgin Mary, became chapter four in what would eventually become our Rule and Life.

When the Rule and Life was presented to Pope John Paul II for approval, the date of December 8, 1982 was requested—December 8th, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady and 1982, the year that the worldwide Franciscan family was celebrating the 800th anniversary of the birth of St. Francis in Assisi.

When the Rule was approved by the Holy See, it was accompanied by the Apostolic Brief, whose incipit reads “Franciscanum vitae Propositum”, the Franciscan ideal of life which “even in our times continually draws men and women desirous of evangelical perfection and thirsting for the kingdom of God.” The Brief then goes on to mention the public profession of the evangelical counsels, apostolic activity and prayer, fraternal love, penance and Christian self-denial. The Brief, signed by the Holy Father, then goes on to mention the previous rules of Leo X and Pius XI. The real novelty of the Brief, however, is in the third paragraph where it mentions that the pontiff knows “how diligently and assiduously this Rule and Life has traveled its path of ‘aggiornamento’ and how fortuitously it arrived at the desired convergence of different points of view through collegial discussion and consultation, proposals and studied amendments.” There is no attempt to hide the history of the different points of view as well as the collegial discussion and consultation that was an integral part of the process. It is significant that this document, our Rule and Life, inspired by Vatican II and undertaken in obedience to its mandates, should in some unique and novel way, embody the collegiality and subsidiarity that were the hallmarks of that council. With Pope John Paul II, we too can express our hope and “trust that the longed for fruits of renewal will be brought to full realization” as we continue to live and deepen our appreciation of our Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis.

Sister Nancy Celaschi, OSF is a member of the General Council of the School Sisters of St. Francis, with its headquarters in Rome. She earned a Masters Degree in Franciscan Studies from St. Bonaventure University in the U.S.A. She served as Secretary-General of the IFC-TOR from 1993-1997 and in 1997 was named the first director of its Spirit and Life Department. She has translated several books on the history of Third Order Regular communities into English and has taught Franciscans in Asia, Africa, Europe and North America.



Called to Heal : Inter-religious Dialogue in the TOR Tradition

Sister Margaret Carney, OSF

Throughout the pontificate of John Paul II, the call to inter-religious dialogue was clear and consistent. Having been present for the first World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986, the correspondence between our Franciscan vocation and the commitment to Christian unity and inter-faith cooperation has always seemed to me to be of extraordinary importance. My presence in 1986 was possible because our professors at the Antonianum (I was just beginning my doctoral studies there) procured tickets for us and accompanied us as we joined in the vast array of prayerful expressions during the day. Prior to that momentous event, I worked with Thaddeus Horgan, friar of the Atonement, as a member of the International Work Group. This team was charged with developing the text of the Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular. Thaddeus brought a rich theological expertise to the group and a profound ecumenical consciousness. During the period of Vatican II, he helped to direct the Center for Christian Unity housed in the Pamphili Palace on Piazza Navonna. There the official observers of Christian churches gathered regularly for dialogue, theological exploration and hospitality. In our years of close collaboration on the Rule text, I gained an intense appreciation for the strength that a Franciscan spirit could contribute to such dialogue. My experiences with a modern institute of the Third Order Regular that was totally dedicated to this mission of unity, the Friars and Sisters of the Atonement (Graymoor, New York) reinforced this appreciation and still does.

In recent years I have had the privilege of attending two Franciscan ecumenical encounters (one in Rome and the other in Canterbury, England) organized by the Minister General of the Friars Minor and the Friars of the Atonement. These intimate exchanges between Franciscan religious of the Roman, Anglican and Lutheran affiliations have been special opportunities to examine the power of the Franciscan charism as it reaches across jurisdictional boundaries separating our churches.

If asked how our Rule and Life text contributes to the conversation, I would answer that it is not a matter of finding a “proof text” (a particular passage that explicitly proves the connection or argument) but rather the contribution resides in the fundamental values that ground our Rule and that dispose us to a way of being in the church and in the world of inter-religious exchange. We might think of the call to ecumenical consciousness and action along these lines.

Conversion

In a former time, the goal of Catholic missionary work was summed up in the notion of conversion. Bringing unbelievers or Christians of other denominations into the fold of Roman Catholic membership was the work of the missionary or evangelist. Today this term in our TOR vocabulary holds a profound biblical richness of meaning. The conversion/ metanoia is the profound orientation of our full humanity towards the will God has to engage our whole minds, hearts and souls in knowledge, love and ministry. It is the summons to be ready at every moment of existence to “turn”—to redirect and correct one’s errors and ignorance by existential attention to God’s summons. It promotes within us a spirituality of attention, readiness to change, and humble recognition that there is always something incomplete in our knowing, loving and serving. Such an attitude, deepened over a lifetime, allows us to constantly grow in appreciation for the truths of other faith claims, the appeal they have and the power they exercise. It allows us to enter into dialogue with a readiness to be challenged and even discomfited. It calls us to be ready to redirect behavior and to modify our attitudes. These are fundamental dispositions for dialogue and they are strengthened by our Franciscan commitment to a life of continual conversion. There is no relativism here. We do not intend to be ready to renounce or to relativize our fundamental faith commitments. Rather, there is readiness to find ways to engage the other, precisely as other with love and courage. This is great equipment for the work of inter-faith dialogue.

Contemplation

Our lives are centered on God revealed through the Spirit in Jesus Christ. The contemplation of the outpouring of charity that the Incarnation reveals is the driving energy of our spirituality. Our formation, both initial and ongoing, draws us over a lifetime to find deeper levels of meaning in the events of the life of Christ, the primary texts of Scripture, the riches of our theological inheritance, the rich variety of cultural expressions of spirit and life found in the cult of the saints, Marian devotion—all of these avenues open

our hearts and minds with new light and power over time. Yet, for those who take the time to engage in study, or whose life and work provide adequate opportunity, the encounter with the teachings, practices and cultural expressions of other religious traditions can also be a powerful invitation to contemplate the rich variety of ways that the Spirit breathes in our midst.

To listen to the powerful music of the Jewish high holy days, to witness the daily cycle of prayer in a mosque, to stand before an ancient image of Buddha and see the reverence it inspires--these and similar experiences invite us to stand in a new place in order to consider the variety of ways that men and women find the path to the divine. At moments of deep unifying insight we may catch a glimpse of profound threads of connectivity. And, if we are truthful, we will admit that we can sometimes be confused and upset by customs that differ radically from those we hold sacred. Yet this very encounter with something different and obscure calls us to recognize the fact that our certitudes appear equally baffling to those raised in different religious communities.

This combination of experiences of consoling insight and disturbing confusion pulls us further into a stance of contemplative quiet, respect and humility.

Minority/Humility

It is not possible to be a citizen of the planet today without feeling the pain of outrages committed in the name of religious fundamentalism or sectarian violence. We must insist more and more upon educating ourselves and our students to the dark underside of excessive sectarian zeal. The complex weave of religious identity, ethnic and racial pride and hostility towards one's enemies—real or imagined—should inspire of profound humility in all who truly care about the development of mature religious identity. While assuring each other that the true nature of our religious tenets demands respect, reverence for life and peaceful ways in the world, we who belong to the Abrahamic faiths see a continued spiral of violence taking lives in the name of a twisted version of religious observance and identity. Simple solutions and simplistic approaches must be abandoned and a commitment to deep education and thorough-going formation in respect, tolerance and mutuality must become our consistent way.

Poverty

Francis, Clare and their earliest companions knew that all was gift in their lives and that rendering back to God the praise and the perfection of these gifts was the central task of their lives. While insistence upon a life stripped of all but the essentials of material support was central to the early Franciscan project, the kernel of interior poverty was always assumed to be the soul of this asceticism. Holding on to one's opinion, judgment, ego-driven assumptions and desires was a form of hoarding, of amassing personal wealth that Francis warned about continuously. In our current call to inter-religious conversation and communication we have ample opportunity to make such exercise our own again. It is difficult to become part of the community of exchange, or dialogue, without the ability to set aside one's desire to stay within a personal zone of comfort—not matter how exalted the nature of the comfort zone is. (For example, my total at-home-ness in my religious community, parish, or spiritual circle can make it extremely difficult for me to enter into an exchange with the required humility and willingness to be corrected or to acknowledge bias and limitation.) When the exchange of honest dialogue includes, as it must, an unsparing look at the ways in which our differences have led to discrimination, even violence towards one another, we must have that inner poverty that makes space for the truth and the pain of the other—no matter how inconvenient for ourselves.

Perhaps Pope John Paul II was himself expressing a profound spiritual poverty when, in 1986, he invited the leaders of the world's religions to join him in Assisi. After all, he chose Assisi, not Rome for this encounter. Was it his way of acknowledging that the many acts of violence perpetrated in the name of the institutional church over the centuries would be painfully present to the memories of guests invited to pray in the imperial splendor of the Vatican's great basilicas? Did he realize that the mythic genius and universality of Francis would—after seven centuries—still provide a “still point” of meeting and mutuality

for Moslem, Hindu, Native American voices, as well as the voices of the religions that have been part of work towards Christian unity in the last two centuries? Whatever his reason, his choice proved prophetic and effective. On the day following the meeting, the friars of the Sacro Convento spent their hours leading these representatives through the basilica and telling the story of Francis with history's greatest visual prop—the fresco cycle of Giotto. In those hours, the recognition of a common ground reflected in Francis' story of humility, penance and minority was repeated often in the sacred conversations of that day. We have the opportunity to continue that momentum in the 21st century. Let us pray for the wisdom and will to do just that.

Sister Margaret Carney, OSF, currently serves as president of St. Bonaventure University. Sister Margaret has been past Director of the Franciscan Institute and Dean of Franciscan Studies. She served eight years as General Superior for her Congregation, and in 1982 she served on an International Commission that composed a Franciscan Rule text for the Franciscan "Third Order Regular". She is well known throughout the Franciscan world for her dedication to all things Franciscan.

Interrreligious Dialogue and Religious Life

Fr. Elias D. Mallon, SA

When the Catholic Church during the Second Vatican Council declared in the document *Nostra Aetate* that it "rejects nothing of the truth" which may be found in other religions, it set itself irrevocably on the path of interreligious dialogue. The founding of the Secretariat for Non-Christians and later the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue signaled the seriousness with which the Roman Catholic Church took its relationship with the great non-Christian religions of the world.

Pope John Paul II with his indefatigable traveling visited many Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu countries where he spoke at length of the necessity of dialogue between religions. The great "Assisi event" saw the pope bringing together the leaders of most of the world's religions to pray each in their own way for peace and understanding. His speeches to the Muslim youth in Morocco, to Muslims in Turkey, the Sudan and other places stressed the importance which the late pope placed on the Roman Catholic Church being in active dialogue.

Pope Benedict XVI's recent trip to Turkey showed that the Catholic Church's commitment to interreligious dialogue has not dimmed with the change of popes. Benedict's visit to the mosque in Istanbul and his silent prayer there were powerful signs of his commitment to the dialogue between the Church and Islam. The speeches which he has given both in Turkey and in Rome further underline his concern for and commitment to interreligious dialogue.

Simply as part of the Church, religious share in the Church's commitment to interreligious dialogue. As people who serve the Church and its mission, religious cannot ignore the interreligious thrust which has been introduced by the Second Vatican Council. There are, however, further reasons why religious should find the interreligious dialogue particularly attractive. Over the centuries religious have been at the forefront of the Church's encounter with the great religious traditions of the world. One need only think of Francis of Assisi and his encounter in Damietta, Egypt, with the Sultan Malik al-Kamal probably in or about 1219. Occurring as it did during the Fourth Crusade, the encounter of Francis and the Sultan ran counter to the attitudes of the times and was a symbol of how people of two different religions could meet with faithfulness and courtesy. The great translation projects of the Middle Ages in which the Qur'an and the works of many Muslim thinkers were made available to western scholars was the work of the monks, notably of Cluny under its Abbot Peter the Venerable (1094-1156). The monks employed Arabic speaking Muslims to assure that the translations were fair and accurate. One cannot think of Christianity in China

without thinking of the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). Traveling as a missionary to China, Ricci developed a profound respect for the Chinese culture and religiosity. He clearly was well acquainted with Daoism, the dominant religious tradition in China. He was himself highly respected by the Chinese and was promoted to a high rank in the government. Ricci was ahead of his time in his attempts to inculturate the Gospel to categories which the Chinese would understand.

Even in modern times before Vatican II religious have been leaders in the area of interreligious dialogue. Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916), the founder of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Jesus, dedicated his life to living among Muslims and quietly giving witness to the Gospel. The Missionaries of Africa, founded by Cardinal Charles Levigier (Archbishop of Algiers) in 1868, have been leaders in the dialogue between Catholics and Muslims.

It is not just the Catholic-Muslim dialogue which has received the attention of religious. Both during and after Vatican II the Benedictine monk Bede Griffiths (1906-1993), known as Swami Dayananda, dedicated his life to the Catholic-Hindu Dialogue. In his writings he probed the discipline of meditation and yoga which Hindus had developed over millennia and applied them to Christian practice. Likewise, the Cistercian Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was a leader in the dialogue between Buddhists and Catholics. In fact, he died while in Bangkok returning from Asia and meeting Buddhist leaders. Merton's works—especially those written later in his life—show his deep understanding and appreciation of Buddhism and the discipline of meditation. In a very real sense, Merton's work has been continued by the Interreligious Monastic Dialogue which has been meeting for over two decades. The "Gethsemane Encounter" refers to two meetings of Buddhist and Catholic monastics which took place at the Cistercian monastery of Gethsemane (Kentucky, USA) in 1996 and 2002.

The number of important and fruitful encounters between religious and non-Christian religions in Africa and Asia can be multiplied almost to infinity. It should be clear, therefore, that the involvement of religious men and women in interreligious dialogue is not something new. It is not even something which began with Vatican II. In an extremely bold outline above it should be clear that religious men and women have been involved in the interreligious dialogue literally for centuries. The encounter between religious men and women is not limited to one religious community either. Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans of very variety, the Sisters of Zion, the Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus, Missionaries of Africa, and others far too numerous to mention have been dialoguing with Jews, Muslims, Buddhist, Hindus and others and continue to dialogue with them. Dialogue is part of the witness which religious and all Christians give to the boundless (and boundary-less) love of Christ.

In a world where all too many conflicts have a basis in religion, interreligious dialogue is no longer a luxurious option. As people called to bring Christ's peace and to help overcome conflict in the world, religious are called to learn about the other religions of our planet. Religious are called to address the great questions and problems of our time and religion as the source of and solution to conflict is one of those great questions. Now more than ever, there is the need for people of different faiths to understand each other, promote cooperation and overcome violence. The engagement of religious men and women in this great endeavor is not only a part of our long history; it is the call of our future too.

*Elias D. Mallon, an Atonement Friar (Graymoor), holds a licentiate degree (STL) in Old Testament Studies and a PhD in Near Eastern Languages from the Catholic University of America. He worked on his doctorate and dissertation research at Eberhard Karls University in Tübingen, Germany. He has taught at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA and worked for the then Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. Fr. Mallon directed the Graymoor Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute for eleven years and has been involved in the Catholic/Christian-Muslim dialogue since 1985. He has authored several books and articles on Islam, the latest being *Islam: What Catholics Need to Know* (Washington, DC: National Catholic Education Association, 2006) and "Shiite Muslims—The Party of Aiy," *America*, February 6, 2006.*

A Call to be Peace Makers: Franciscan Life in Mission

Sister Violet Grennan, MFIC

The implicit and explicit call of our Third Order Rule to be peacemakers is not merely a familiar or optional invitation to each individual member and to Third Order Franciscans as a corporate body. As we celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of our Rule and Life, irrespective of country, continent or hemisphere in which we live and minister, the renewed call to be makers of peace in our world today presents us with an opportunity to review that call and recommit ourselves to a personal and communal challenge in 2007 and beyond.

While the call to be peacemakers has a generic and global ring to it, the specific expression of living out that calling as Franciscan women and men will be found in our respective worlds as we, individually and as a body, attempt to follow in the footprints of Francis of Assisi whose very life was patterned on the God of peace made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Concretely, the context for the full response to the call is our life-in-mission today. It is a call and a challenge without gloss that asks for a full measured and concrete response.

Our Life Together

The opening lines of Article 30 of our Third Order Rule challenge us to remember that:

“As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts. No one should be roused to wrath or insult on their account, rather all should be moved to peace, goodwill and mercy because of their gentleness.”

How very well Francis knew the human person, knew himself. To announce peace with one's lips can be a relatively easy gesture. To have it in one's own heart, the root location of peace and violence in our personal lives, and to relate from that heart is, at times, the greater challenge. It is often in this very arena of our lives that we experience in a very concrete manner the call to ongoing conversion, to forgiveness, to reconciliation and, over a lifetime, to become the embodiment of peace.

Fundamental to an authentic and recognizable response to the call to be peacemakers, to become the embodiment of peace, is a way of being in relationship with all God's creation that identifies us as sisters and brothers who embrace the gospel way of life as lived by Francis and Clare of Assisi. Such a way of being in relationship is clearly stated in the chapter of our rule that speaks to our experience of sisterhood and brotherhood (Fraternal Love).

“If discord caused by word or deed should occur among them, they should immediately and humbly ask forgiveness of one another before offering their gift of prayer before the Lord” (Art. 24).

The words immediately and humbly add a concrete emphasis to the call to relate in a particular way with brothers and sisters with whom we share our life-in-mission. This way of being in relationship, of being a living expression of the core values and attitudes of the Franciscan experience, brings to birth and, over time, develops and sustains a manner of living that identifies one who is the embodiment of peace, one who by example and word, follows the footprint of God in our world. It is a journey that begins with the self.

The pathway and journey to becoming a man of peace did not come naturally to Francis and does not come naturally to us. Ordinarily, it comes through self-knowledge, suffering, humility, an experience of personal poverty and prayer that leads one to an objective perception of one's identity as he or she realizes the truth inherent in Francis' admonition “What a person is before God, that he is and no more” (Adm XIV:2). This is the true self, blessed and broken, gifted and vulnerable, sinner and redeemed, that God calls to live in relationship with other sisters and brothers who share our common humanity. Often, it is in this circle of relationships within our own communities and fraternities rather than in ministerial or other interpersonal relationships that the greater challenge to live the gospel ideal presented in our Rule And Life is experienced.

As women and men who are called and desire to become the embodiment of peace, we are further challenged in Article 24 to remember that

“..if anyone seriously neglects the form of life all profess, the minister, or others who may know of it, are to admonish that person. Those giving the admonition should neither embarrass nor speak of evil of the other, but show great kindness. Let all be careful of self righteousness, which causes anger and annoyance because of another’s sin. These in oneself or in another hinder living lovingly” (Art. 24).

Implicit in this passage is prescribed for us a way of relating to those who, at times, may live the rule of life differently than prescribed. The manner of relating encouraged evokes a compassionate human and loving response that enables one to be at peace with self and the “other” rather than a response of harsh self-righteous judgment that “hinders living lovingly.” It is this unconditional “making room for the other”

no matter how differently they present themselves that marks us as followers of Jesus Christ and Francis. Francis, in numerous incidents in life with his brothers, evidenced this pattern of relating. He experienced his own creatureliness, his vulnerability, his poverty and humility as he gazed into the face of God and, in turn, embraced that same humanness in his brothers. While the century, the location and the particular circumstances in which we live differ from those of Francis, the call to “embrace the other” in the concrete circumstances of our daily lives is as valid now as it was then. Our “embrace of the other” gives witness by example and word to our fidelity to the gospel vision of life as lived by Francis who passionately desired to become a footprint of God in his time and place.

Our Life in Mission

The chapters of our rule that speak to our Franciscan identity, our life together, the spirit of prayer, poverty, the way to serve and work and our apostolic life prescribe a pattern of living for those of us who freely choose and profess to follow the gospel vision of life as lived by Francis of Assisi. This pattern of living when evidenced by example and word identifies us in a particular way as followers of this gospel vision.

Our call as Franciscan women and men is not solely to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and to communion with our brothers and sisters who share our vowed life. The call is inextricably linked to a call to mission - to be in relationship with all of God’s creation in a particular way that identifies us as followers of the God of peace and of Francis of Assisi. The call is to communion in mission.

The commentary on Chapter IX: Apostolic Life, reminds us that the preceding chapters focus on the foundation of our call, our Franciscan identity, our prayer, our relationships as brothers and sisters and our attitude toward service and work. It is out of the lived experience of the values and attitudes presented in these chapters that our mission and ministry as peacemakers is brought to birth. The mandate presented to us is clear:

“The sisters and brothers are called to heal the wounded, to bind up those who are bruised, and to reclaim the erring. Wherever they are, they should recall they have given themselves up completely and handed themselves over totally to Our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, they should be prepared to expose themselves to every enemy, visible and invisible, for love of Him because the Lord says: “Blessed are they who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 5:10).

Such a mission mandate is no mere option for those who claim to embrace the gospel ideal of Francis of Assisi, the man of peace. This section of our Rule and Life, like so many others, holds no ambiguity. Regardless of the particular geographic location, cultural context or specific ministry in which we find ourselves, our way of being in relationship with particular people in their respective realities calls for a response that is full measured and that identifies us as those attempting to become a “footprint of God” wherever we are in mission. Such a response, we are reminded, implies among other challenges, actively preparing to expose ourselves to “every enemy, visible and invisible... to the “other” whomever that “other” might be. Concretely, in our respective locations, cultures, and places of mission and ministry, whom do we consciously name or not name as “enemies” and how do we relate to them?

This choice to embrace the “other” did not come naturally to Francis as he himself reminds us in the opening lines of his Testament where he refers to his first encounter with the leper. Neither does that embrace of the “other” the contemporary lepers in our world, seem to come naturally to us. For Francis and for those of us who identify ourselves as his followers, the life of Jesus as presented to us in the gospel is our road map. Jesus’ total self-giving, concretely, evidenced in his life, passion and death is the

pattern of life we embrace. This is the teaching and example of a full measured and concrete response.

The words completely and totally in this passage from our Rule and Life serve as a bold reminder that we have willingly embraced this way of life and hearken back to Francis' words to those follow in his footprints: "Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves so that He who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally" (EpOrd 29). For Francis, as he experienced God's total gift of self in the person of Jesus Christ in the sacrifice of Our Lord Jesus Christ and on the cross, nothing less than a total response, a total giving of self to and for the other was sufficient. Is it for us?

The particular manner in which we are to carry out our mission, to go "among the people", has been described in Chapter 7 of our Third Order Rule "The Way to Serve and Work":

"Let the sisters and brothers be gentle, peaceful and unassuming, mild and humble, speaking respectfully to all in accord with their vocation. Wherever they are, or wherever they go throughout the world, they should not be quarrelsome, contentious or judgmental toward others. Rather, it should be obvious that they are joyful, good-humored and happy in the Lord as they ought to be. And in greeting others, let them say, "The Lord give you peace" (Art 20).

Quite simply, a genuine greeting of peace is only credible when those to whom it is given see and experience our joy and peace as we move "among them". No matter how different their values, attitudes, way of life or religious beliefs, we do not judge, we do not attempt to impose new structures or beliefs. Neither do we deny our own religious beliefs and values; rather, we meet people where they are, make room for them, hear their word and speak a word of peace to them. The commentary of our TOR reminds us that "Francis believed we should not judge others even if they appear untouched by the gospel (cf. RB 2:17). They should be touched, however, by our witness to joyfulness in the Lord. This alone would make our peaceable greeting credible" (TOR Commentary, p. 37).

Conclusion

From these reflections on the call to be peacemakers that is a theme in our Third Order Rule, focused more specifically in Chapters V, VII and IX, emerge five fundamental values for our Franciscan Life in Mission:

- Life-in-mission is a call to continual conversion (penance) and openness to hear, believe and obey the Spirit active in every dimension of human existence and particularly active in conversation and engagement with others and "the other" in service and communion.
- Our life in community/fraternity is our primary means of witnessing, by example and word, the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- To be missionary is to go "among the people" to be with them as sisters and brothers who live the gospel.
- A Franciscan approach to ministry is best described by our way of being in relationship with others. It is about creating spaces where human persons can flourish as daughters and sons of God.
- The call to be peacemakers in our world is a life-long journey to become the embodiment of peace and it begins with the self.

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The Latin American Ecology and The Franciscan World View

Prof. Ricardo Antonio Rodríguez

In South America, the ancient thing concerning gold, silver, diamonds and numerous metals, minerals, etc. imposed upon our culture an indescribable torture, which is still present in diverse regions. This not only because of the devastation itself but, rather and above all, because these goods were not placed at the service and improvement of the life of the inhabitants of the place. Let us think of Brazil, the gold extracted from our ground: this gold certainly did not improve the quality of life of the persons involved in the process of the extraction, while it did notably enrich other regions of the world, for example, some regions of Europe. According to Rotzetter, capitalism itself has stressed these differences and has proposed a doctrine of expropriation and of dominion. Things being thus, the role of the Franciscan thought is important as an instrument for the building up of peace, and to see how Francis acted before the challenges of his time.

From Saint Francis of Assisi we can learn that material goods should be a means to promote life (Test 16, RnB 2, 4), since these gifts come from God (Ad 2,3 and RnB 17, 17) and are less important than persons (2 Cel 80, 2). Unfortunately, humanity has not as yet succeeded to understand this bond. And perhaps not so much because of the ill will of the great masses of the population, but rather because the governments, in general, are more interested in holding power, together with their other allies, than of making of power a possibility to improve the common good (AP 11, 1-10).

The Franciscan thesis of poverty is present in the attitude of Francis, when he identifies humanity with the leper (1 Cel 17, 4). In this way, he transcends the concept of 'humanity' and perceives in that man, in a pitiful state, the presence of Christ (LM 1,6,2). This experience is fundamental. In this way, we are aware that it is not sufficient to look at persons, but we have to see beyond the person herself, noticing or perceiving a dimension which unites us and concerns us (CA 64, 1ff), a dignity or lack of it, which makes us responsible and which binds us. It is necessary to see beyond that which we see, it is necessary to see in suffering and pain of human beings, the suffering and pain of Christ.

In this case, in a world dominated by materialism and money, in which means tend to become ends, persons run the risk of being manipulated, that is, to be considered the instrument and not the end of the technical-scientific process. In the face of this reality the Franciscan attitude can awaken us from a profound sleep. It is not sufficient to discuss on ecology in the schools and the universities, we must also consider the forgotten human being (RB 4, 2; RnB 8, 3.7), immersed in the universe of possibilities and of determinations. If for Goya the sleep or dream of reason produces monsters, we can deduce that also the sleep or dream of human sensibility equally produces monsters or even more dangerous ones. Therefore, we need to recover our ontological dimension of the care of those who suffer (2 Cel 22,2; 2 Cel 85,8; RnB 8, 3), and replace that which is human in the center of the ecological process.

The re conquest or recovery of what is human can truly represent a new possibility of relationship with the environment (Ad 1, 19-20; 5,1; 1 Cel 82, 1; 3 Cel 1, 3).

The lack of access to the means of life such as for example, work, and even the lack of qualification, made women and men become the lepers of the time of Francis. That which has notably diminished these exaggerations, is the growing research of a new spirit, and that which begins to overturn the process which gave priority only to economic richness in detriment of persons. We can count innumerable experiences of economic progress which succeeded well in harmony with the auto-sustainability, in all the regions of our continent and, principally in Brazil, the Franciscan thought has become the mysticism of the reconstruction of a new ethic, founded on a new point of view.

The nudity or lack of everything in Francis (1 Cel 15, 1-3; 2 Cel 194, 1) before a society and before a father, also lost in their affairs, involved or entangled in the net of productivity, makes us think, on the one hand, about the diminished human being, deeply wounded in his human identity, and on the other it opens before us the path of hope. Because culture has resulted from that which we choose and from what we understand.

In the way of being of Saint Francis of Assisi there is a profound rupture with the quibbles and the mechanisms which subjugate the human and if we wish to construct a new society in which the lamb and the wolf live peacefully together, we need to change our way of acting. New men, new women capable of giving life to a new way of facing the human existence.

If we want to intensify the sense of what is human and construct a new society in our continent, a society of new human beings, as Saint Paul says (Eph 2, 11-22), it is necessary to break the chains which bind and diminish the human greatness (RSC 6, 1).

If, on the one side, we should not reduce the Gospel just to a socialist banner, on the other before the ecological attitude of Francis, to love and to serve the Gospel forgetting those who are excluded means to be irrational from the Philosophical point of view and a heretic from the theological point of view.

In Francis, heaven and earth meet. The evangelical ideals of love and of peace, when they touch the human, they place the foundations of a way of thinking, of celebrating, of acting and of living, which, unavoidably, transforms in one way or other the life of the society. We must learn with Francis a new and old form of loving others moiré than our own knowledge. To feel more the life and its bonds, its connections.

At the time of Saint Francis of Assisi leprosy was a form of exclusion, of contempt for many who called themselves followers of the Gospel. In the kiss given to the leper (2 Cel 9, 9-11) and in the reference to them (2 EP 58, 1 ff), Saint Francis teaches us what is necessary to see beyond immanence.

It has no sense in treating ecology to contemplate only the animals, the plants, the rivers and the bushes. We must begin by the human being, a fundamental, integrating, responsible element and more interested element of the maintenance and of the respect of the ecosystem, because the quality of life depends on the environment.

Francis recommends to his brothers not to possess any animals (RnB 15, 1) and forbids them even to ride horseback (RnB 15, 2). He even reaches the limit to overturn the relational logic, saying that we should submit ourselves to animals and not subject them (SV 17).

In many works of a social and communitarian type, in educational, environmental, and pastoral projects, etc., the Franciscan Family has supported, sustained and constructed more human perspectives of solidarity, helping from the North to the South. from the West to the East to give life to a more peaceful, more just and more fraternal society.

The mysticism of creation, based on Franciscan spirituality, can lead us to self sustainability in a new and wise way. And all this giving our existence a rich and full sense of significance, similar to the

expression and the idea contained in the Canticle of Brother Sun - Fratello Sole. Looking at everything and at everyone with a profound desire of praise, allowing ourselves to be fascinated.

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Franciscan Clarist Congregation among the poor in Kenya

*“When you did it to the least of my brethren , you did it to me ”
(Mt, 25:40)*

Sister Mello, FCC

The general Synaxis discussions and decisions, in the year 1986, high lighted the members for reaching out, to the dark corner of the world. The words of our Lord were being echoed in the hearts of many sisters and inspired , energized and strengthened them to undertake any risk, for the betterment of the less privileged brethren in Kenya.

It is in the year 1989, a small seed of Franciscan Clarist Congregation was sown in the soil of Mbiuni Parish in Machakos Diocese, Kenya. Four sisters started responding to their special call to serve the people in Kenya in different apostolic fields. It sprouted up very soon and still growing into a big tree stretching out its branches in the far and wide areas of Kenya . At present 48 professed sisters (Indians) and 7 Junior sisters (Kenyans) are serving in 5 dioceses with various apostolic activities . We hope , we will be able to respond to the needs of the people and give them the liberating good News of our Lord, in a very big and large scale .

The locations selected by F.C.C. sisters

The area where the sisters are provided at the beginning, was a sprawling wilderness inhabited by wild animals. To add to this, there was no water sources, electricity and even conveyance for easy traveling. Really it was a dark corner. Generally the lands here are classified as arid and semi-arid lands. Agriculture is the main occupation for which farmers totally depend upon rainfall. The whole area is covered with uncleared bush and planes with lots of grain which the people use for cattle grazing.

It was not a block for the selfless and joyful services of the sisters. Impressed by the work of these sisters, many approached them with valuable ‘offers’ to extend their services in different locations to work for the integral development of the people. Still Bishops of other diocese demand our presence in their parishes. Now our F.C.C. sisters are extending their services in the fields of :-

1. Education – imparting quality education from the grassroot level.
2. Health care – working in dispensaries and hospitals. Also sisters go for mobile clinics where poor people find it difficult to reach the dispensaries or any other health centers.
3. Rehabilitation Centers for physically disabled and others for mentally handicapped.

4. Home for the orphaned children and home for the older people who are uncared and unwanted by their children or relatives.

5. Rehabilitating the street children – The patience and tolerance of our sisters in dealing with them is praiseworthy.

Socio-Economic Condition – where F.C.C. is rooted:

Mostly our fields of activity are centered near the mountainous and most underdeveloped parts of Kenya. The people around are very poor marginal farmers except a few business men. People suffer much due to the failure of crops and many become victims of the Killer diseases like Malaria, Yellow fever, Tuberculosis and now HIV/AIDS also.

Transport is a major problem. Common mode of transport in the rural areas is bicycle or oxen cart. We cannot see tarmac roads in the villages, only earth roads, which would be washed away during rainy seasons, making the roads impassable.

Education is very expensive in Kenya. There are public and private schools, but many children fail to attend the school and get quality education because the children have to walk kilometers to reach school. With the introduction of free Primary education by the government, many attend the schools, but quality education is very far still. A good number of our F.C.C. sisters are rendering Voluntary Service in this education field, to uplift the standard from grass root level. We are donated land in some rural areas to establish institutions for imparting quality education. It is a joy to watch and see how the uneducated and uncultured villagers learn slowly and improve their life style and behavioural pattern.

Unique Peculiarities and its problems :

Polygamy is Culturally accepted here and often it spoils the dignity of women and marriage. As a result, quite a large number of children born become uncared and unwanted. The social evils connected with family life are many and varied. Polygamy systems, single mothers, divorce, early death of parents, early birth by school girls, remarriages, all leave behind many problem children like orphans uncared and unwanted in the society.

These children suffer very much not for their mistakes, but for the mistakes of their parents. Eventually they become a great threat to families, societies and country at large. As their education is neglected, they are prone to all kinds of undesirable practices, sicknesses and bad tendencies like stealing, drinking, smoking, raping etc. In short their physical , emotional , mental, moral, spiritual and cultural growth is dark and desperate.

To alleviate the sufferings of these neglected ones and to uplift the standard of these less fortunate children of these areas as far as possible, many organizations come forward. Our Congregation also is not at the back . The driving force behind all our projects is to promote socio-economic development of these afflicted ones, by giving them good educational facilities to ensure their all round growth and development . We have already started rehabilitation centers where the neglected, unwanted and abused children are provided with comfortable stay, health care, conducive environment for learning and acceptable facilities for harmonious growth and development.

We are not forgetting the older people of the society. The house visits had revealed us the pathetic situation of the families. Our eyes have seen many of the older people at home are neglected and uncared. Many are thirsting for `Love and light'. Our home for the aged is giving shelter for a few older women .

Medical assistance:

Malaria is the tropical disease of Kenya. The number of HIV/AIDS positive cases are tremendously increasing day by day. Government publications and wall posts are very many concerning this Killer disease. Foreign fund is flowing without ceasing for the rescue of this particular patients. Still death rate is high. . Money is not a problem for us to do anything good to the poor. The only thing needed is, that we have to go through the right channel and for the right cause.

Health clinics are out of reach for many in the rural areas. Also medicine and treatment is very

expensive in hospitals. Our dispensaries in the rural areas are really a blessing for many afflicted and wounded people in that dark corners. Local and foreign funding agencies are ready to provide money for the organizations who come forward with determination to do voluntary service for the poor.

Conclusion

Following the spirit of our Father Francis and Mother Clare and also imbibed with the thrill of our founding mothers, our sisters are enthusiastic to work in these fields. They Zealously come forward to spare their life together with these despised and outcast, weak and afflicted ones, oppressed and the destitute Many local priests and big dignitaries of the locations, appreciate our way of life. Many want to know and learn more about our Charism. They are sure that we F.C.C. sisters are serving the people not on Commercial purposes, but with some other unknown and hidden motives . We hope , we are fulfilling our mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, who selected the path of the poor humble and crucified one. We sisters are much happy when we see with our naked eyes , that many of the last and the least of the society are specially benefited by our humble services. The very strong positive impact on the target group energizes us to extend our services more and more.

Sister Mello, FCC, is a member of the Franciscan Clarist Congregation in Kerala, India. She is appointed by the General Council as the co-ordinator of the Congregation in Africa since 2000. As missionary, she is offering her service for 15 years in Kenya. In the former years she was a teacher in the higher secondary school and also served as the Provincial Superior.

Collective Article-1

The Relevance of Franciscan Spirituality in the Future

New ways of living (expressing) the Franciscan Spirituality

Sister Maria Stella Carta, SSM

The Lord grants us the grace to celebrate this jubilee, the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the Rule TOR: a time of grace but also of reflection and of synthesis.

The desire to continue to share the Franciscan Charism leads us to question ourselves concerning the importance of Franciscan Spirituality in the future and on the possible ways to render it visible and concrete. This means that we are asked, if there is a future for our spirituality, how will it be, and which will be the foundation on which it will rest.

Conscious that our Charism, and, therefore, its vitality as well as its existence, is in the hands of the Lord, we try to find an answer to this reflection. The TOR Rule makes explicit a fundamental and identifying nucleus of all our spirituality.

“The Rule and the life of the brothers and sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Assisi is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, in poverty and in chastity” (n. 1). Is there perhaps, a more simple spirituality (in the etymological sense of the term simplex = without folds), than the Franciscan one which is proposed, from its origin, to observe the Holy Gospel. It is the heart, the corner stone, the sense, the end of the Franciscan Charism, and it is possible to live it at all times and places. It is a gift but at the same time, a task, which the Spirit has entrusted to Francis, and to

all those who have followed and follow him, a gift which is for the benefit of the whole Church. It is, therefore, the possibility of this observance which allows us to be able to think of the importance of our spirituality in the immediate future, but also in the future.

Hope impels us, therefore, to tell ourselves in all truth, that the presence and the incidence or impact of Franciscan spirituality in the Church and in history, will be intimately linked to the love and the fidelity to the Gospel, to the radical choice of the Gospel totally and without marginal notes.

What did the observance of the Holy Gospel mean for Francis, if not to allow himself to be transformed in body and spirit in alter Christus (another Christ)? In the same way for us who share the Charism, it means to accept the call to be in conformity with the Lord Jesus Christ, and this transformation takes place in the vital relationship of salvation for me and for others with the Risen Lord.

It is in this observance that fidelity to the Church is developed and lived and finds the way to express itself in the love for the poorest: "The brothers and sisters are called to take care of and cure the wounded, to raise the depressed and to call back those who have gone astray" (n. 30).

Such a love for neighbour is set in the love for Christ: "The brothers and sisters promise obedience and reverence to the Pope and to the Catholic Church ..., promote always union and communion with all the members of the Franciscan Family" (n. 3) and "always subject to the Holy Church and firm in the Catholic Faith, they will observe poverty, humility and the Holy Gospel of the our Lord Jesus Christ" (n. 32). Probably fidelity to the Church and the love for the poorest, will continue to be the privileged way through which we will find new ways to live and express our spirituality.

And it is in being brothers and sisters, that is, persons called to build up relationships of communion and of charity, that we can take care of and cure the wounded, raise the depressed and call back those who have gone astray. Precisely because we are Franciscans, we cannot remain insensitive or indifferent before a humanity which is always more lost, wounded, depressed, disorientated, which has lost the Way, no longer guided by Truth, and which no longer knows the value of Life. This is the "cry" which challenges us to allow so many brothers and sisters, to discover in us the encounter with God. The way and the manner is taught by the Lord Himself: it is the logic of the Incarnation, of the love which impels us to share and to understand and consider. While humanity is always more signed by the logic of egoism and individualism, the Franciscan Charism is called to look always for the more authentic way of communion with and of fidelity to the Church. This is to begin from our fraternity: it is necessary to place ourselves in an attitude of acceptance of the Spirit who blows and impels us always toward the good of the Church and of men.

Sister Maria Stella Carta, SSM. Suore della SS.ma Madre dell Addolorata.

Collective Article-2

Tibor Kauser, SFO

"What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete-as complete as God's knowledge of me Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.

(1Cor. 13. 12-13.)

Looking to the future... No human being can see what a spirituality is to be like even tomorrow. However, there are some important points of importance for me. Only a couple of simple things:

Being human in the world, living as one of the billions of the children of God is the first point of our vocation. I encourage all of you to experience, live and show that divine love which has created and has been loving us with his paternal love. It is so simple to recognize, that God is Father, and we, all human beings are unique, unrepeatable persons. Each one of us has to recognize this dignity and both be proud of it and respect it in the others.

Being Christian in the world means for me to live the joy of being redeemed, and do my best to make also others to learn it. Since we are baptised, this part of our life is the first part, the first stage of our eternal life. In this respect nothing is to be more important for us in this world but to be witnesses of the gospel: in our prayer, in our work, in our community.

Being Franciscan in the world seems to be more evident, since we have a seraphic spiritual father, who gave us an example, how to follow Christ in his footsteps. However, there has always been the temptation for us, Franciscans to follow Francis instead. This should be given the most attention in the future, perhaps. Until the direction of the present world is away from God we must be aware of our vocation which must be directed towards Christ. When we look at Francis, it must be remembered that our attention must be focused on Christ, and our Franciscan vocation is a way of life, a means, not the purpose, a starting point not a purpose. As Francis said: "Brothers, let's start to love....".

Good, but how to do it? What could be the answers to the present demands of the world, showing a way to the future? I try to share with you some simple ideas of mine.

Think globally - act locally. The present state of the world is different. Now it can be seen all around: think locally, act globally. All the economics, the culture, even sometimes also religion seems to forget the single person, the benefit of the one. The more widespread the things are, the greater the loss in the personal relations is. Not denying the usefulness of the global actions, our vocation is better to find the necessities of the local. Our small steps are the mite of the widow.

The individual way of thinking of today looses the fraternal bonds and separates one from another. It's not added, that this separates the one also from God. This is why fraternity is so important: the bonds that strengthen the relation between people also strengthens the bonds between God and man. And also, vice versa: everyone, who binds himself to God with his prayer and contemplation, is an instrument of God in the fraternal life, in the human relations.

The liberal way of thinking, the liberalism often dresses himself in the look of the freedom of God. Freedom is always the same, is said, but is it really? The only one true freedom is that of the children of God. Who is in the focus? The Lord or me? Being free means, that I accept, that it's God who gave me his law and his love. Not as the world says today: your own laws and your own love. Instead of going around myself, God gives me a perspective, a goal, a direction. Instead of a cul-de-sac, we have a way which is worth to go on. Only this extends to the future.

The II. Vatican Council has encouraged the spiritual movements and religious orders to rediscover the roots of their spirituality. I also invite you to reconsider how rich our tradition is, how much we can learn from our ancestors.

From Francis, who makes us discover that God is a father and all we are his children. This fraternity, this brotherhood with all the creatures is the guarantee that we have a future.

From St. Bernardin of Siena, who redirects our eyes to the name of Jesus, and makes us remember that our faith, our religion has a Person in the centre not a mere theory. Only a person can love, which love lasts forever.

From St. Elisabeth of Hungary, who, in all of the states of her life, was convinced, that God never lets anyone down.

Learn from the past, live the present, look to the future. The three 'L' can inspire us to take the paddles. Let's set out to the deep.

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Collective Article-3

Bro. Xavier Anthony, CMSF

“Relationship” is the best answer to the question; is Franciscan Spirituality relevant today? If so how? Let me explain the concept of Relationship. Christian Theologians hold the view that the whole of Christian Theology can be summed up into one word ‘Relationship’. He who is in relationship with God is in a state of grace. In so far as Christian Theology is a faith reflection and faith is the expression of a deep relationship with God, we can say Grace is a relationship. St Francis of Assisi was always in grace; in relationship with God, people and with the whole of creation. At this juncture it is astute to keep in mind that having a relationship is totally different from being in relationship, as Joanne Brazinski OSF says in her article “Being Franciscan means being in Relationship”. Being in relationship evokes in us a sense of the presence, identity and of existence of the other. Having a relationship can connote the idea of possessing or the desire to keep for oneself or hold on to. Usually when I have something, it is for my personal use.

In the case of St. Francis, his ‘being in relationship’ was evident through his life. His writings: Viz. The Praises of God, the Admonitions, Canticle of the creatures, the Rules, the Testament and even the Biographies provide us with a clear picture of a man who was in deep relationship with God. The Paternity of God and the Fraternity (Fraternal love) of Jesus, made Francis consider the whole universe as a fraternity and even family of Brothers and Sisters. The Characteristics of the Franciscan Fraternity, that have abundant traces of the notion of relationship, would place us in a better position to understand the concept of a relationship embedded in Franciscan Brotherhood and Sisterhood.

The Franciscan Fraternity was rooted in Evangelical Charity (RnB.9.13, Rb.6, 10, 1Cel.38). There was Mutual Acceptance in Franciscan Fraternity which even St. Clare adopted into her own community (C.Assi.51, 1Test.). Mutual Respect and loyalty to everyone was the hallmark of Franciscan Community (Am.15, RB.7). Mutual Availability to all is inherent when one renounces everything and follows the Lord. A total Renunciation makes one available for help and collaboration with the others. The dictum “poverty unites and wealth divides and alienates” finds its place here (Rnb.9, 3, 2Cel.180). Total Equality that calls for a doing away with the distinctions of educated and uneducated, minors and majors, scholars and ignorant, superior and inferior, is a beautiful concept in the Franciscan Fraternity (2Cel.191). It is here, in this sense that Francis conveys the idea that the superiors are servants of all (RnB.6,3). Fraternal Dialogue and Meeting are the other principal characteristics that we can so richly find in the Franciscan Fraternity. One who listens to the Word of God and meditates on it, is in dialogue with God and others (1Cel.20, 30.Rnb.18). This dialogue with God should be extended to people of all faiths, religion, denominations and even to the creatures. And therefore we find that Franciscan Fraternity was open to all: to thieves, brigands, friends and strangers, sick (lepers) and healthy, poor and rich (RnB.7, 15). St. Francis strictly ordered his Brothers to be gentle with every one and respect everyone as they are with their strengths and weaknesses (RB. 3, 11-12). Hence we find a Franciscan Fraternity open to all even to the creatures (1Cel.60, 61, 77-79).

Living these characteristics and being in Brotherly and Sisterly relationship, which of course also Gospel based, (cfr. Jn.15:12, Lk.6:27, Jn.17:21, Mt.18:22, Mt.5:41) is the best and perhaps the new way of living the Franciscan Spirituality. Incarnating these Franciscan values in our lives will surely make us real Franciscans and living these values for all God’s people to see and experience will clear the doubt of relevance of Franciscan Spirituality. In this nuclear age we have the knowledge to blow the humanity to pieces, but we do not have the knowledge to put them together! Putting together the broken pieces of humanity is the scope of Spirituality; Franciscan Spirituality.

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rendering his services in various formation houses of the congregation for several years.



Let the sisters and brothers
be, Gentle, Peaceful
and Unassuming

Mild and Humble,
speaking Respectfully to
all in accord with their
Vocation.

(TOR Rule, Article, 20)

Since the Trinity is the source of our mission
for peace, We, the Brothers and Sisters
of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis,
are called to Incarnate the Gospel “of Our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things
in Heaven and Earth have been brought to Peace and Reconciliation”.
(TOR Rule,12)
