

A Symposium on  
“Lifelong Formation for Franciscan Men in the U.S.  
In service of God’s Mission”  
25-27 October 2018

Sponsored by the Duns Scotus Chair in Spirituality  
Catholic Theological Union

For three days 40+ Franciscan brothers assisted by two OSF sisters gathered for a symposium on lifelong formation for Franciscan men at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) in Chicago, Illinois. The gathering was sponsored by the Duns Scotus Chair in Spirituality at CTU. Over the past two decades the chair, endowed by the John the Baptist Province of OFM friars in 1997, has sponsored scholarship and educational initiatives in support of the Franciscan charism. These efforts have included lectures by renowned scholars such as Sr. Ilia Delia OSF of Villanova University and study days by leading Franciscan thinkers such as Bill Short OFM of the Franciscan School of Theology.

This first of its kind symposium was designed to expand the conversation by inviting first and third order brothers from a variety of communities and jurisdictions to ponder the promise and demands of forming Franciscan men for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Participants included Atonement Friars, Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn, TORs, OFM, OFM Conventual and OFM Capuchin friars from across the U.S. and some brothers from Europe. Invitations had been extended to multiple other communities as well.

In 1217 the Franciscan order was officially divided into two separate families by Pope Leo X in his proclamation *Ite Vos*. In recent years there have been various “Beyond *Ite Vos*” efforts from the international to local levels to move beyond the long standing divisions within the Franciscan family, and build avenues of communication and collaboration. As the current Duns Scotus Professor of Spirituality Edward Foley explained, the advisory board for the Duns Scotus Chair—composed of OFM, OFM Conventual, OFM Capuchin and OSF representatives—recognized that this first symposium could not address the needs of every group. It was thus decided that it would be appropriate to focus on the formation of Franciscan men so that they could develop a more united presence and provide leadership around the vision for the Franciscan family in the future. As previous events sponsored by this chair have invited the presence of Franciscan Sisters and Secular Franciscans, so any future symposia would also expand to include these important members of the Franciscan family.

The symposium was structured around a series of presentations, two of which were open to the public. Br. Michael Perry OFM, the current minister general of the Order of Friars Minor, offered an opening lecture on Thursday evening entitled “*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased:*’ Musings from the Margins.” Taking his cue from the Gospel of Mark (1:9-15), Br. Michael explored that text as one that presents necessary elements for the lifelong journey of religious life and discipleship. His presentation, livestreamed on CTU Facebook and soon to be posted on CTU’s website, was attended by a large group of Franciscans, including men in initial formation from the OFM, Conventual and Capuchin communities. The following day,

three participants in the symposium offered responses to Br. Michael's presentation, which spurred the morning discussion.

A second presentation was offered on Friday morning by Sister Meg Guider OSF, Associate Professor of Missiology and Chair of the Ecclesiastical Faculty at Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry, and member of the Duns Scotus advisory board. In her "Stewarding the Grace of Fraternity: Living out the Franciscan Charism of 'Being Brothers' in Service of God's Mission" Sr. Meg reminded the group that it was only after the Lord gave Francis brothers that the Poverello focused on the Gospel form of life. Then, employing Matthew's parable of the talents (25:14-30) she invited the brothers to consider what kind of stewards of the grace of *fraternitas* have we, are we and will we become. These challenges were the focus of discussion for the rest of the morning.

On Friday afternoon Br. Dan Horan OFM, Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at CTU, offered a presentation on "Liquidity and the Abyss: Lifelong Theological Formation for U.S. Franciscans." Br. Dan focused on contemporary theological trends, challenges and hopes that need attention in forming Franciscan men today. In this "liquid" era in which there are powerful forces attempting the decolonialization of standards of knowing and experience, Br. Dan proposed that two theological areas that needed attention by Franciscans was a theology of authenticity and the meaning of the human person. Small group discussion and interaction with the presenter occupied the participants for this first afternoon session.

The final session on Friday afternoon was designed as a "grass roots" moment in which participants were asked to brainstorm about what issues were not being addressed and needed to be raised up, as well as what issues or ideas really resonated with them and needed to be remembered. This discussion, like the whole of the symposium, was facilitated by Sr. Margaret Carney, OSF. The former director of the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure University, and then President of that University, Sr. Margaret brought not only formidable facilitation skills but also a vast knowledge of Franciscan theology and spirituality to the task. Her ability to weave Franciscan sources, stories and poetry into the process contributed to the forward momentum of the symposium and the lively engagement of its participants. This grass roots session yielded affirmations and particularly unaddressed issues that covered seven large post-it sheets. Br. Pat McCloskey OFM, the editor of *St. Anthony Messenger* magazine, volunteered to serve as secretary for the symposium and assisted Sr. Margaret in compiling and recording these comments.

Friday evening was the second public presentation, this time by Br. John Corriveau OFM Cap., former minister general of the Capuchin Order and recently retired bishop of Nelson, British Columbia. His topic was "A Brotherhood of Missionary Disciples." In his presentation Br. John noted that in a unique turn Francis chose to model his form of religious life on the life of Jesus' missionary disciples. From this flowed his two main points: 1) the embrace of Franciscan brotherhood is the embrace of Jesus Christ, and 2) that embrace leads to Franciscan brotherhood. Br. John's impassioned presentation was again attended by a large group of friars, including many brothers in initial formation from the various Franciscan communities in and around Chicago. The presentation

was video-taped and will be available in the near future on the CTU website. On Saturday morning, three symposium participants responded to Br. John's talk, which sparked the morning conversation in the symposium. In final session of the symposium, facilitator Sr. Margaret asked the group to consider "What is your new mandatum after this symposium" and "What is our mutual mandatum from this symposium?" The participants offered many suggestions for what they and their individual obediences could do in light of this gathering, as well as suggestions for further work of the Duns Scotus Chair.

It was agreed that a first follow up to the symposium would be the composition of this executive summary, which would be distributed freely to all participants and multiple other Franciscan communities and contacts along with the four talks by Br. Mike Perry, Sr. Meg Guider, Br. Dan Horan and Br. John Corriveau. These talks are copyright by CTU and can freely be duplicated and shared, as long as the copyright is acknowledged. There is also a plan to publish these talks in an open access book form along with those presented by Br. Dominic Monti OFM, Br. Regis Armstrong OFM Cap., and Br. Jude Winkler OFM Conv. in the November 2017 "Beyond *Ite Vos* Gathering" held at CTU.

As part of the environment for the symposium Br. Jerry Bleem OFM, director of formation for the OFM interprovincial temporary professed program in Chicago and an adjunct Associate Professor at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, coordinated a juried art show entitled "Prayer and Devotion: Franciscan Art, Franciscan Artists." This unique installation, on display at the Veeck Art Gallery at CTU from September 16<sup>th</sup> through December 15<sup>th</sup> of 2018, features over 25 works in glass, textiles, paint and other media. Symbolic of the Franciscan tradition for embracing beauty as a central theological theme, these beautiful works provided the setting for fellowship among the symposium participants whose meals were served in the gallery. Similar attention was given to the prayer environment that included celebrations of the Liturgy of the Hours punctuated by music, texts and prayers in nine different languages, reflecting the diverse heritages and ministry experiences of the symposium participants.

For further information on the symposium, please contact Edward Foley, Capuchin, Duns Scotus Professor of Spirituality, Catholic Theological Union at [foley@ctu.edu](mailto:foley@ctu.edu),

Lifelong Formation for Franciscan Men in the U.S. in service of God's Mission  
Franciscan Symposium: October 25-27, 2018  
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA

*"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

Musings from the Margins

Bro. Michael A Perry, OFM

**Gospel: Mark 1: 9-15**

It happened in those days that *Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan* by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*

At once the *Spirit drove him out into the desert*, and he remained in the desert for *forty days*, tempted by *Satan*. He was *among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him*.

After John had been arrested, *Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God*: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Good evening to you my dear Conventual, Capuchin, Third Order Regular, Atonement and OFM brothers, Brothers of the Renewal, Secular Franciscans, Franciscans of the Anglican Communion, and to all others who are present. Whenever St. Francis of Assisi would greet a group of people, especially while engaging in popular preaching, he would call for the peace of God to descend upon them. Perhaps this was something he learned during his brief visit to Egypt 800 years ago, staying for a time in the camp of the Muslim military leader al-Malik al-Kamil. I hope that this same peace might descend upon all who are participating in this symposium.

It is a great joy for me to be here with you in and to participate in this symposium dealing with the question "What it means for us Franciscans in general, and those of us who share an identical rule and charismatic origin, and indeed for all who have embraced consecrated life and the public profession of the evangelical vows to be engaged in a lifelong process of conversion?" Perhaps the more difficult question we must face is "What forces from the heavens will be required for of us to *be convinced* that the journey upon which we have embarked is lifelong?"

**Mark 1: 9-15: Jesus' Lifelong Vocational Journey of Conversion.**

I would like to take a moment to reflect on the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, which deals with the initial moments in the life of Jesus where he moves from a private life in and around Nazareth, to a public life that would eventually lead him to Jerusalem, the center of religious and political power, and to his death. I believe Mark's text offers some clues about the nature of our religious profession, and presents us with elements necessary for the lifelong journey upon which those of us who are religious have embarked. However, I also believe this applies equally to all disciples, as Pope Francis has made clear in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*.

In the opening lines of the text, Jesus goes from Nazareth to the Jordan river where his cousin John is conducting some form of ritual purification, an initiation into a new form of life, one involving a personal conversion, and entry into some new type of community. Jesus 'goes out' in

search of John. Can we speak of Jesus feeling the pull of the Spirit, a desire to understand more fully the purpose of his life and his future?

No matter what response we give to this question, what we can affirm in Mark's understanding of conversion is that it always has a social or public dimension and is not simply a private or individual matter. Through baptism into 'the way' of Jesus, one receives a new identity that must be deepened, developed over a lifetime of decision-making, of choosing to place God at the center of one's life. Discipleship in the community of Mark is about embracing the gift of the calling Jesus offers to each and every person. It also is about undertaking this new way of life that one has received as gift, one that is understood as it is lived together in a community of others who also have received the same gift, and together with the one who accompanies and helps to explain the significance of the gift, the rabbi (Jesus).

Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark is experienced as an unfolding of the mystery of God over the course of a lifelong process, with Jesus as the first and model disciple. This unfolding takes place most powerfully in the constancy of exchanges, of praying, eating and drinking, and walking along with the Master who shares his life with his disciples, teaching them to follow his example.

**Franciscan reflection:** If I might step out of the biblical text for a moment, I find some key elements in what we have seen in this first part of the text of the Gospel of Mark present also in the spiritual intuition and life practice of our founder, St. Francis of Assisi. Francis' own calling begins with the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Bro. Cesare Vaiani, General Secretary for Formation and Studies for the Order of Friars Minor, in a recent symposium, argues that for Francis, God is experienced as the 'first author of our formation and guide of our evangelization' ("Riflessioni sulla formazione iniziale e permanente nell'Ordine oggi," 6 June 2018, p. 4). After only one year, Francis and the brothers, feeling pressure from without to explain what their Gospel life was about, prepared a short document that was presented to the Pope for his approbation. This document no longer exists but the brothers, gathered in annual chapter, continued to add to the initial text what they were learning about their life with God, in fraternity, and their engagement in mission (preaching, social service, etc.). Upon his return from Egypt, Francis felt pressure to prepare a document that could explain to them the life into which they had been called, the vocation they had received, and the responsibilities that came as a result. In 1221, St. Francis and his brothers prepared a text that, fundamentally, presented their way of life modeled on the way of life of Jesus presented in the Gospels. This *Regula non bullata* (Early Rule) was to serve to inspire the brothers to commit to follow Jesus. Francis did not want his brothers to be guided by a set of rules to which the brothers were to conform their lives. He wanted them to remain in deep communion with the poor and crucified Lord Jesus, and for them to seek to live this experience of deep communion by living among brothers and sisters who were poor, excluded, exploited, powerless and landless. Still, this document for evangelical living did not receive sufficient support from the brothers, which meant that Francis was required to prepare yet a third document, the *Regula bullata* (1223) that could provide sufficient security to his followers that the way of life they had professed met with the approval of the Church. Perhaps the brothers were acting in good faith, trying to protect the movement from being quashed by the hierarchy of the Church who sought to root out evangelical movements that were critical of the structures, and others that proposed a way of life that, according to the Church's understanding of its identity and mission, was inconsistent with the received faith. Francis complied with those seeking a stricter description or 'rule' to govern the movement, with the help of friars trained in Canon Law and the assistance of Cardinal Ugolino. However, Francis would not relent in his conviction that the Gospel provided

the fundamental vision and means for achieving what God had asked of him, and what he was convinced God was asking of all of the brothers.

Thus, Francis transformed the concept of rule into a way of life, modeled on the life of Jesus discovered through his personal engagement with the biblical texts, from moments of intense prayer and contemplation, and from ‘practicing’ the way Jesus proposed to his disciples and to Francis. For this reason, Francis’ document on living the Gospel is entitled *Rule and Life*. The *rule* is grounded in Jesus’ experience of living in a particular way what he received from the Father in the waters of the Jordan and that was further developed in all succeeding moments of his life, the choices he made to love God and love all that God had created, the ‘golden rule’. Francis added a few canonical additions to ensure its approval by the Holy See.

The *life* involved the daily re-commitment of Francis and the brothers to seeking the way of conversion and transformation. This *Rule and Life* applied equally to all brothers, those at the beginning of their vocational journey as well as those in the middle or nearing the end of their journey. In the mind of Francis, there was no distinction between the responsibilities for receiving and living the way of life of the Gospel set out in the *Rule and Life* between novices and professed members of the Order. Nor was it the case that the older, professed friars were to transmit a set of rules, norms and regulations to the younger members and novices. What mattered most in the mind of Francis was the centrality of living what the friars professed. They were to be living signs of the very life they publicly professed, which means they were to be men grounded in a life-giving relationship with God, to be men of prayer. They were to show love and mercy to one another through the daily living out of the Gospel in the fraternity, the privileged place for the revelation of God in the life of the friars. And they were to open their lives in a special way to God’s poor, living among those who were discarded, exploited, marginalized. And they were to pursue a life of penance – *metanoia* – that would further open them to the mystery of God present everywhere, present even in the followers of Islam, in the self-serving political and aristocratic classes, and present in all of creation. This progressive conversion process could only take place if the brothers were to come to understand that their vocational journey ran from the moment of their first calling to the day when they would depart from this world and be welcomed in to paradise (cf. *Admonitions, Letter to a Minister, and Testament*).

**Mark 1:11: “You are my beloved Son; with whom I am well pleased.”**

Mark then tells us that Jesus submitted to the ritual purification and baptism in the waters of the Jordan River conducted by John the Baptist. Mark does not miss the opportunity to inform us that something amazing happens in the life of Jesus: whatever awareness he might have had of his identity and mission prior to the event of baptism, we will probably never know. But the moment Jesus re-emerges from the waters of the Jordan the Spirit of God descends upon him “like a dove,” and a voice cries out from the heavens: “You are my beloved Son; with whom I am well pleased” (Mk. 1:11). Jesus receives confirmation of a new identity, one that is given to him as gift from God, and that, according to the evangelist, forever changed the course of his life. While Jesus initially took the initiative to leave Nazareth and go into the desert in search of John, here Jesus no longer is in charge; the Spirit of God now assumes the role as the chief protagonist. This does not mean that Jesus is exonerated of all personal responsibility, submitting blindly to the will of God. Rather, it means that the calling he received, and I would suggest that all religious receive, begins with God. What follows is a lifelong partnership, God doing what God can do, Jesus walking with us at each stage of our lives, doing the same for us as he did for the disciples of Emmaus, opening our

eyes to see the handiwork of God, God's provident presence in our lives, and enabling us to remain constant in our vocational journey.

Before I continue, one critical comment is required. We know that the Gospels are not meant to serve as an historical account, a daily ledger of what transpired in the life of Jesus, his early disciples, and all those who witness his life and work.

What Mark and the other evangelists provide is unity of identity and action: who Jesus is from a theological point of view; and the meaning of his life, words, and actions not only for his life but for the life of all who would follow in his way. What emerges from the Gospel stories is a 'narrative unity', revealing that each decision, each action of Jesus forms part of a cohesive whole. Jesus' going to Galilee where he preached about the kingdom of God was a consequence of the decisions he made earlier, which took him to the waters of the Jordan where he was confirmed for God. This action of going into the waters of baptism and being confirmed by God is what then led him to be 'driven by the Spirit' into and through the wilderness/ desert. Radcliff calls this a "narrative unity" (cf. "The Identity of Religious Today," CMSM, August 8, 1996).

"To have an identity is for the choices that one makes throughout one's life to have a direction, a narrative unity. What I do today," continues Radcliff, "makes sense in the light of what I did before. My life has a pattern, like a good story."

Jesus' life has a pattern; it makes sense from beginning to end. This is precisely what the evangelists perceive in the life of Jesus. Mark has embraced the same call as the one received by Jesus, namely, to become a disciple of the Father. He recognizes that discipleship in the community of the Lord Jesus is an invitation to receive the gift that Jesus received, and to enter into an entirely new way of perceiving (insight), seeing, leading to a new way of living and acting. Jesus' life becomes the model *par excellence* for a lifelong commitment to conversion of mind, heart, and deeds required of all Christian disciples. "Come after me," "follow me" (Mk. 1:17; 2:14), "for there were many who followed him" (Mk. 2:15). This 'following' of Jesus will lead to many crises, and to the cross but also to the resurrection. Does this have any bearing on our life as consecrated religious today?

### **Crisis as the Way of Christian Discipleship and a Model for Religious Life**

What takes place next in the Markan text is actually quite disturbing because it suggests something fundamental and fundamentally perplexing about discipleship lived in the community of the Christ. Jesus is immediately *driven* into the desert by the Spirit of God where, we are told, he will remain for forty days and undergo temptation at the hands of Satan, the devil. The text also tells us that he will be accompanied by wild animals and angels who minister to him. Mark's understanding of Christian conversion is actually quite radical. Jesus's own 'conversion' and transformation take place under very strenuous conditions. The desert, no matter how glorious some recent spiritual writers have tried to make of it, was no joking matter. Without stretching the text of Mark too far, and taking into account the narrative of this same event in the Gospels of Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13), I believe we can say that Jesus participated in a formative process that progressively helped him to understand and to embrace that which the Father expected of him and, as a consequence, would be required of him. The first expectation was that he embraces the new identity that God, in the Spirit, was offering to him: "My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." What was 'requirement' was that he place his entire life at the disposition of God's action and God's intention for him, for the sake of this disciples and for the same of the world.

Mark's brief text makes reference to the number 40, used symbolically to recall the events of Moses, exodus, the desert wanderings, struggles, and sufferings of those who united their lives and their future hopes in the mission of Moses, following him into the desert in order that God's promise of fullness of life might come to pass in their their lives, and the lives of their descendants. The 'promise' to which Moses and the Israelites committed their lives, literally risking their lives, was composed of three central themes or benefits. First, the promise offered to them an opportunity to undergo a transformation of the conditions of security for their lives with the dawning of a new reign of peace and tranquility. Second, they hoped that by leaving all behind in order to follow Moses, and by consequence to follow God that their lives would be richly blessed, a material improvement and guarantee that all of their basic needs would be satisfied. And third, they believed that by following Moses in pursuit of God's promise, their lives would be become righteous and holy. As with Moses, so with Jesus, both were considered to be God-fearing and God-centered men of faith. But this did not mean that because of their personal holiness or faith, they would be able to find shortcuts to the promised land. There are no secret directions for how to get to the promised land, no quick access to the promise of coming into the freedom that God offers to those who love and follow him (Cf. Romans 18:18-21).

What is fundamental to the stories of both of these God-fearing men is that there is no shortcut to the promised land; there is no way to short-circuit what is required in order to be *set free from* all that is not of God, and to be *set free for* living God's dream for all of humanity and the created universe. Forty days, forty years – they are just another way of saying that to enter into the life of discipleship offered by God to each of us is to enter into a lifelong engagement to seek conversion of heart, holiness of life, the pursuit of the justice and the peace of God.

There is a further theological dimension to what Jesus experiences in the desert and that prepares him for his lifelong journey. For Mark, crises and suffering, the result of choosing daily to follow Jesus with an undivided heart, contain the seeds of a redemptive grace, God as it were unleashing his love and mercy upon all peoples, leading to the transformation of human history and the conversion of each disciple who has undertaken the 'way' of Jesus. Is there something that we could learn from this theological understanding of 'redemptive suffering' presented in Mark's version of who Jesus is, and who we are as disciples of the crucified and risen One? Is there some way we might include the redemptive aspects of suffering in what has, among some programs for Ongoing Formation among Franciscans as "Plans for Fraternal Life and Mission," which might help us to embrace with conviction and commitment a way of life that helps us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, only Jesus! In what way might the theme of redemptive suffering help us to understand and create ways for living better together, suffering with one another in fraternity/community, and encouraging one another to pursue a lifelong commitment to penance and conversion? Does this theological theme of redemptive suffering also have something to offer us as we seek new ways to enter into encounter with all peoples, especially those who are poor, excluded, who have suffered all forms of violence in their lives, who have had to run for their lives and for the sake of their family, abandoning their homes and countries in search of a place where they might experience peace, security, fraternity/brotherhood, and where they also might be able to live productive lives? Perhaps we might do well to reflect on the transformative power of the cross in the life of Jesus, his early disciples, and countless Christian followers over the course of two millennia, in order that we might allow the power of the cross to transform our ways of living together and giving witness through evangelizing efforts to a wounded humanity and planet.

### **Franciscan reflection on Crises and Opportunity:**

In my service as Minister General, I have been struck by the difficulties that arise within the lives of the brothers when confronted with adversity. Perhaps it is a sign of the times but the capacity for brothers to recognize new opportunities for growth through the experience of suffering, self-doubt, disappointment (with self and others) - falling in and out of love; losing zeal for the evangelical life and for missionary evangelization; inability to relate in an adult, healthy manner with those who are in the service of authority; inability to share one's life with brothers in the same community - seems to be seriously limited, if not altogether absent. In a recent private meeting with one brother of the Order, he informed me that he could no longer live with the brothers of his local fraternity and that if the Provincial did not move him to the community where he wanted to live, and if I as General would not intervene on his behalf, he would leave the Order. On another occasion, a brother informed me that, after conducting a "serious discernment" regarding his vocation and his future – the 'serious discernment' consisted of spending several hours in prayer, talking with his sister, with a close friend, and even with a priest he never before met - he had decided he could no longer tolerate the local guardian and that he would be moving to another fraternity. When I asked him whether he had spoken with his local fraternity or with the guardian, he informed me that he did not trust any of the brothers, that they all were 'under the thumb' of the ill-willed guardian. I also asked him whether he has spoken with his provincial. He told me that the provincial "is a weak, old man who does not make any decisions." In the event that he actually moved to another fraternity, the provincial would do nothing except try to 'calm the waters after the storm'.

What is the point of me telling these real life stories? Is it to shock you? If you have been living the consecrated evangelical life for a period of time, there is probably nothing that will shock you. The best and the worst of humanity is on display in our local fraternities/communities. Is it to tell you that the brothers [or sisters] no longer respect authority in religious life? Or is it to confirm what you already know: the religious life project our founders received from divine inspiration, a life project to which we are – or are not – committed is in serious trouble? The crises experienced in religious life should be recognized for what they are, and for what they are not. They are clear signals, the 'smoking gun' pointing to the urgent need for us to revitalize our personal and fraternal/collective lives. These crises actually can serve to fortify us, to clarify our understanding about our own lives and the public commitment we have made, which must be continually purified and translated into the way we relate to God, to our brothers (and sisters), and to God's people. They form the 'quotidian' of our lives, the locus of formation to Franciscan – indeed to all – religious life.

In a recent interview by David Brooks, political commentator, popular speaker, and author of a book entitled *The Road to Character*, he points to one of the key building blocks for the construction of human character, namely, the ability to discover in weakness the road towards authentic identity. Brooks writes:

"Through history, people have gone back into their own pasts, sometimes to a precious time in their life, to their childhood. And, often, the mind gravitates in the past to a moment of shame, something committed, some act of selfishness, a lack of courage...You go into yourself, you find the sin which you've committed over and over again through your life, your signature sin out of which the others emerge. And you fight that sin, and you wrestle with that sin. And out of that wrestling - that suffering - then, a depth of character is constructed. And we're often not taught to recognize the sin in ourselves. And we're not

taught in this culture how to wrestle with it, how to confront it and how to combat it” (<https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=532841680>).”

“Out of that wresting - that suffering – then, a depth of character is constructed.” I would like to suggest that one of the most critical aspects of the formative process, from beginning to end, from postulancy to end of life, is that of creating a space within our religious fraternities/communities where we actually help one another learn how to confront the truth about ourselves, those areas of life requiring further conversion. Our beautiful formation documents speak loftily about this confrontation with self. They speak about the centrality of interpersonal relationships, for which religious are “experts in communion” (cf. *Vita Consacrata*). These same documents tell us that communion is the most vital way to giving concrete form to the evangelical councils and to the quality of our witness before the world. Still, no matter how much these documents call our attention to our identity as “a living organism of fraternal communion” (“*Fraternal Life in Community: Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*,” CIVISA, Feb. 2, 1994, 2.c), our efforts seem to be frustrated by a serious lack of sustained attention to and formation for interpersonal, fraternal living. Many of us struggle with the forces of individualism present in our fraternities/communities and in our work for evangelization. The strong pull of individualism creates serious difficulties because the individual – “I” – becomes more important than the collective - “we”. The struggles posed by individualism are further complicated by a vision of our identity and mission and ministry comes under the spell of a misguided clericalism, one that seeks privilege, concentrates power, and progressively excludes others from fully participating in the lifelong process of building conditions for the realization of the kingdom of God. In far too many cases in our religious life, fraternity, collaboration, and communion are pushed to the margins, leaving the glorified individual at the center. In this same scenario, even God becomes an unwelcomed stranger.

The three Minister Generals of the First Order (Capuchins, Conventuals, OFM) spoke about the impact of individualism, and also of clericalism, on all programs of formation, initial and ongoing, and the impact it has on the discernment process among men coming to join our way of life. Too many men join with the idea of becoming clerics, priests, using Franciscan religious life as an instrument for attaining the ultimate goal: priesthood. The negative consequences of this attitude upon fraternal life and mission can be devastating, as some or many of you might already have experienced. I have often thought about asking the Vatican whether we could suspend all ordinations in the Order for five years, giving time to the brothers to focus on developing the central vocation God has given to them (to us), the call to a radical evangelical life, cultivated and nourished by prayer, a strong fraternal life, and engagement in the missionary activities of the church. This last ‘missionary’ dimension is grounded in the social doctrine of the Church, in the promotion of integral human development, a new way of speaking about the inseparable relationship between faith and justice, prayer and peace, and lifelong formation to the evangelical counsels. Clearly, the missionary dimension will require of us to live among and be formed by those who are poor, excluded, migrants, all those who are living on the front lines in the struggle for human dignity, justice, truth, and reconciliation (cf. *Pilgrims and Strangers: Resources for Formation*,” OFM Curia, Rome, 2008, pp. 23-24, 31-32, 39-40, et passim).

### **Franciscan Religious Life: A battle for God**

What if religious life were not about embracing lofty ideals, and even less about living a protected, pampered life but rather about choosing to enter the desert, to embrace human and spiritual battle as a necessary consequence for having chosen to place one's entire life in service to God and the Kingdom? If we fast forward to the chapters 14 and 15 of Mark's Gospel, we are presented with two texts that deal directly with the suffering Jesus willingly embraced as a consequence of his decision to remain grounded in God, walking towards the Kingdom. In chapter 14, Jesus has to face the prospects of an ignominious, violent death. "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will" (Mk. 14: 36). And in chapter 15, we are presented with one of the most troubling of memories: the cry of Jesus from the cross, one of desperation, confusion, the sense of having been left all alone to face the consequences of his ultimate decision to abandon all for the sake of God's cause, God's dream.

"Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (Mk. 15: 34), "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" There does not appear to be anything glorious or redemptive coming from these words of desperation, uncertainty, absolute loneliness, a perfect description for the 'hell' or 'Gehenna' of the biblical texts. And yet, the cry of Jesus makes sense from within the context of all the choices he made, the way he lived and share his life with his disciples and group of friends and other followers, discovering God and placing living stones for the temple of the kingdom through a life of evangelical nurturing. There is a narrative unity to the life of Jesus, the same narrative unity we find in the lives of the founders of Orders, Congregations, and religious Institutes. God is the author of this 'book of life' but Jesus, and each of the great charismatic founders were the co-authors. This co-authorship, this invitation to work with God in the continuing elaboration of the unity of our human, spiritual, and Franciscan narrative allows us to see the pattern of the divine, the sacred operative in our lives, most especially when we ourselves are unable or unwilling to do so. Those moments when we actually step back and behold what God has been doing in our lives and our world, in our religious communities – among the brothers [and sisters] – and in and through our feeble efforts to care for the 'flock' entrusted to our care, we actually catch glimpses into this narrative unity. Things 'fit in', although not necessarily all things at all times. Nevertheless, there is a great possibility that we will even catch a glimpse of where we are heading, the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus found in the Gospel of St. John 10:10, fullness of life, an abundance of meaning and purpose, the inheritance of a capacity for love greater than we could ever ask or imagine.

#### *A personal story of the life of a Friar*

I remember recently speaking with a Franciscan friar who had suffered much in his life at the hands of the Communists in the former Easter Block countries. He spoke of all forms of deprivation: food, lighting, heating, being harassed by the local police force, subject to physical beatings, and spending extended periods of time in prison. What amazed me is not that he survived these deprivations and difficult moments, which stretched over many years. What amazed me was the peace that reigned in his heart. He told me the more difficult crisis he faced was a crisis of forgiveness and love. Early on in the experience, he remembers praying for the death of his 'persecutors'. At some later stage, he remembers being faced with a situation with one of the very people who had done harm in his life and who was experiencing many challenging health issues. Although he did not want to do anything to help the very person responsible for harassments, privations, and physical abuse, still he could not reconcile his refusal to help in light of his being a disciple of Jesus and a follower of the Saint Francis. In the end, the Franciscan friar helped the suffering victimizer.

What leaps out from this story is not the heroic actions of a man who could have chosen to turn his back on the plight of his oppressor. What emerges from this real life story is that of a Franciscan religious who came to an understanding that he was on a lifelong journey. In some mysterious way, the violence perpetrated by the Communist politician/police officer was transformed into a powerful spiritual tool for reclaiming the dignity that the abuser(s) tried to rob from him. In effect, the positive response of the Franciscan friar to help his victimizer contributed to the further interior healing, which, I believe, provided him with a greater capacity to live and to forgive. Life in abundance! One other detail: this Franciscan is known for his care for the other Franciscans in his local community, and for his faithful service of care for brothers more elderly than he, visiting them, encouraging them, sharing his personal journey with them, inviting them to seek the way of healing, restoration, and renewal of their vocational commitment to be disciples of the risen One. This is what, I believe, St. Paul is speaking about in his letter to the Ephesians (3:17-19):

“...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3: 17-19).

Talk about a clear understanding of a narrative unity!

### **Mark 1:13: “He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him”**

One of the most basic needs of human beings is to feel welcomed, recognized, part of something greater than oneself, loved and nurtured in an environment that enables or facilitates growth in all dimensions of life. As with other human beings, so too with Jesus. In the midst of the desert, a place that normally should be devoid of life and companionship, Mark introduces two sets of ‘characters’ who will provide spiritual and physical companionship to Jesus during his ‘time out’, a time of purification, a time to clarify his identity and mission, and a time to prepare himself for a very different future. Some biblical scholars suggest that the wild beasts and angels arrived at the last minute, as Jesus was completing whatever experience was necessary for him to undergo – let’s call it his novitiate. Other scholars argue that, following Mark’s theological bias for painting discipleship in the plural, i.e. that discipleship is lived within the context of community, the wild beasts and angels were present with Jesus throughout the entire time. For reasons that will become clear, I subscribe to the latter theological interpretation.

We see that Jesus did not undergo his novitiate experience alone. In Mark’s theology of discipleship, Jesus is surrounded by wild animals and messengers of God, the angelic beings who are perceived to be close to God and close to human beings. For Mark, *all discipleship is accompanied*. Whatever ‘stages’ one might wish to speak of in the early community of Mark (inquiry, catechumenate, illumination, or mystagogic), the pedagogy or formative experience provided to those who came to Christ was deeply personal and personalized. Its goal was to provide accompaniment to the individual as he (she) drew closer to Christ and closer to the community of the missionary disciples. It was meant to be life-changing. It also was meant to create within the individual a spiritual ‘docility’ in which their hearts might become ever more open to Christ speaking in and through his Word, in and through personal and shared life events, and in and through participation in the sacramental life and mission of the Church. Aidan Kavanaugh, in his book entitled *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*, Pueblo, New York, 1978, p. 182 et passim), states that the process of the rites of Christian initiation, in whatever form they existed in the early Christian communities spoken of in the Gospels and the

other texts from the New Testament and from early Church practice, served as “a structure of Christian *nurture*.” He argues the need for the Church to recover this understanding of the conversion process leading the baptized to a lifetime process of conforming oneself to the mind and heart of Christ.

### **Nurture as a Permanent Condition for Franciscan religious life**

The concept and practice of nurture as a foundational element in the process of the Christian Rite of Initiation finds a deep echo in the thinking and structures of permanent and ongoing initiation and growth into Franciscan religious life. We have already pointed to one of the key elements of this process of nurture, accompaniment. Franciscan friars who have been living in a diversity of intentional Franciscan communities, primarily in Europe, slowly developed a series of reflections on their experiences of a qualitatively different way of living their vocation. The qualities of these ‘new forms for living Franciscan life’, according to them, revealed the following elements: cultivation of a life of prayer that is more explicitly intense and shared; structuring of frequent occasions for encounter between the members of the local fraternity/community, allowing for greater sharing of life; the desire to live in greater simplicity of life, one that creates within the friars of the fraternity greater awareness and sensitivity to the plight of the poor, excluded, and those who suffer other forms of marginalization and suffering; going to the ‘margins’ with a clear message of hope, love, mercy, an evangelizing life that is fundamentally itinerant and not connected to big structures; and reaching out to laity and involving them together with the friars in shared projects for missionary evangelization in new or older, or more classical, forms.

Following a series of bi-annual meetings, and working closely with the OFM General Secretariat for Missions and Evangelization, a group of friars who were members of one of these intentional fraternities – ‘new form for Franciscan living – prepared a short booklet describing their experiences and proposing a series of fundamental ‘qualities’ necessary for the nurture of living a more authentic, passionate, and joy-filled Franciscan life. This document published in 2014, and updated in 2017, is entitled *Ite, Nuntiates* (OFM General Curia, Rome). I would like to state in a more systematic manner the ‘values’ or ‘characteristics’ that the friars from these various intentional fraternities/communities suggest are conditions sine qua non for promoting a greater sense of, and commitment to, lifelong formation and nurture of the vocation we have received: Among these seven nurturing values are:

- (1) Primacy of the life of prayer and listening actively to the Word of God;
- (2) care and attention to the nurturing of deep fraternal bonds that witness to a testimony of the faith life of the fraternity – the instrument of regular house chapters to discuss the movement of the Spirit and the quality of relationships between the brothers assumes a privileged role;
- (3) A simple, sober life-style witnessing to minority and total dependence on God and interdependence on the brothers of the fraternity;
- (4) Welcome extended to all those in need and sharing of life and fraternity with them;
- (5) Participation in the evangelizing mission of the Church ‘inter gentes’, through itinerancy, and seeking to associate one’s life with those who are poor, suffering, excluded, with a special attention to discovering new frontiers for evangelization (e.g. interreligious dialogue, intercultural encounter);
- (6) Communion with the local Church and collaboration with the laity; and
- (7) Openness to working closely together with members of other branches of the Franciscan family, and with others.

To this list, I would add one further dimension that is vital to the goal of deeper conversion and the nurturing of a more authentic Franciscan life (consecrated life):

(8) Heightened sensitivity to issues related to justice, peace and the integrity of creation, integrating all of the prior seven values into unified vision of Integral Human Development, as demonstrated in Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*, and his Encyclical on integral ecology, *Laudato Si'*.

The process of nurture that *Ite, nuntiate* seeks to promote recognizes that all the brothers of the fraternity are responsible for the care and growth of one another. The role of guardian is to live in fidelity to the life he has professed; be open to listening and accompanying each brother, encouraging them, correcting them, and seeking to promote opportunities for the growth of each and of all in the fraternity in what it means to be free in Christ Jesus (cf. "You Have Been Called to Freedom: Ongoing Formation in the Order of Friars Minor, Rome, 2008, p. no. 48 et passim; Gal. 5:1, 13-14).

### **Keep it Simple: The role of the Daily/Quotidian in Revolutionizing the World**

The context for living these eight central values, which are necessary for the nurture of our evangelical vocation, "is that of ordinary life in the local fraternity, inserted into the cultural, social and political world (cf. *You Have Been Called to Freedom*, no. 25)." Franciscan formation is experienced in the daily rubbing of shoulders, the celebration of liturgical life, contributing to the upkeep of the house, cooking a meal, attending to a sick member, taking time to listen to the brothers, reaching out to someone who has experienced some type of family or other tragedy, enjoying a beer as an occasion to share life and personal narratives of what God is doing in the lives of each person, participating in the regular life of the fraternity, making ourselves available to others (the brothers) so that we might become more available to the Other, God (cf. *Vita Consacrata*, 69).

It is by living a style of life that is grounded in a spirit of nurturing, one that gives priority to the 'normal' rather than the 'exceptional', that celebrates moments of grace in the small things – these are the ways that we slowly but deliberately create conditions for allowing the members of our fraternities, our Provinces, and our Orders to experience God, to experience their and our humanity, and nurture the desire to engage with the world.

I think we could agree that we want to welcome new vocations to our specific form (way) of religious life. Not all would agree that each of our fraternities/ communities are living a sufficiently healthy quality of spiritual, human, fraternal, and apostolic life. For this reason, the Orders and Congregations 'cherry pick' those communities where there is some semblance of the living out of values we profess. Candidates are taken to meet friars living in these 'boutique' fraternities/communities. The problem, however, is that our Franciscan life is not about creating 'boutique fraternities', something that is also true for all other forms of religious life. It is about generating a desire among all members – all friars – to want to live daily, in some way or another, the central values that should guide our personal and communal lives.

The more we are able to create and expand the number of fraternities founded on the most basic of our evangelical values, the easier it will be for all of our brothers, most especially our younger brothers in 'Initial' formation, to experience the continuity that should exist between 'initial' and

'ongoing' formation. Far too often, friars 'transitioning' from the initial to the permanent stage of formation – lifelong formation - discover a wide gap between these two moments. Speaking of 'mind the gap', an allusion to the London subway, far too often religious life cultivates a mentality of those 'on the journey' and those who 'have arrived'. One friar once sarcastically referred to houses of initial formation as 'fantasy islands'. He added: "We need to teach them what Franciscan life is like in the 'real world'." For religious of a certain temperament, the 'real world' is the place where little is expected, even less is shared, a place where religious live and die in isolation, loneliness, apathy, and even bitterness. God is calling all friars/all religious of the same Order/ Congregation, to assume our responsibility for creating conditions necessary so that we might help one another continue to choose to welcome God's gift of our vocation each and every day as something new and potentially revolutionary for our lives, our Orders/Congregations, the Church, and the world. It is in this way that our fraternities will become centers for human and spiritual growth; a place where we can practice what it means to be alive for the Gospel; and a place where we can learn new ways to invest ourselves in the life of the world. We must remember that Jesus goes to Galilee and other regions once he has welcomed his vocation and taken steps to purify and deepen it. Jesus reveals a willingness to put into daily practice the deepening of his vocation – his intimate relationship with the Father- together with those he called to "come after me" (Mk 1:17; 2:14). It is from this deep experience of being evangelized that Jesus and the disciples undertake the mission of preaching and giving witness to the kingdom of God. Clearly, within the context of the Gospel of Mark, we witness the difficulties the disciples experienced in trying to understand the full implications of the vocation each had received, and the challenge that Jesus places before them to "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (cf. Mk. 8:33-34).

### **Called to Live "According to the Pattern of the Holy Gospel" (Francis of Assisi, *Regola bullata* 1.1)**

In 2012, the OFM Order initiated a study of the situation of the 13,000 friars living in 121 countries in the world. A questionnaire containing 153 variables (questions) was forwarded to 1,500 friars who represented the broadest of age, region, apostolic engagement, culture, language groups present in the Order. Ninety-three percent of those who received the questionnaire responded. More than 40% of the friar respondents that their lives had become dry; that they had 'run out of gas'; and that their connection with God was weakening. A smaller percentage of friars felt they lives were progressively overrun with activities and activism, producing within them a sense or feeling being, somehow, 'out of place' in Franciscan and religious life. As a consequence, a similar number of respondents were concerned by the fact that they felt very little emotional attachment to their brothers in the local fraternity, the province, and the Order. Some said they were living on the 'fumes of the desire and experience of intense prayer' they experienced before joining the Order, or perhaps experienced in novitiate.

This same story of 'running out of gas' and feeling disconnected from the fraternity and values of Franciscan life among some friars is also present in the reports from Canonical Visitation to the entities of the Order. We hear about tired, angry, sad, lonely, lone-ranger friars who feel that their experience of living in a friary/local community is more like living in 'Hotel St. Francis'. They live like a registered guest, consume food and drink, and have all the comforts necessary for survival. At the same time, they also do not assume any responsibility for the life of the local fraternity. They take and take without giving.

Unfortunately, this story applies not only of older OFM members who perhaps have had a different type of formation to Franciscan religious life, one that promoted individualism and a mentality of the 'survival of the fittest'. Even today there are regions of the Order – and I would venture to say this is true in the other Orders and other forms of consecrated life – where the friar/religious lives alone, justifying a lifestyle of individualism while hiding behind the argument that they are “responding to the needs of the local Church and to the people of God.” When I sometimes speak with the “people of God” and with the bishops, I hear a very different story. They talk about the ‘long ranger’ religious who listens to no one and who is always too busy with things that have little to do with meeting pastoral needs.

In religious life we also must confront situations where friars/religious spend more time on personal maintenance, making sure their world is structured in a way that they are seldom challenged to grow, and surrounding themselves with walls and barriers that are composed of brick and mortar, and increasingly of fiber optics and ‘likes’ (reference to the “Facebook phenomenon”). The net result of all of these forms of self maintenance is a distancing from God, from the fraternity, and from the people of God among whom we are called to live and share good news. This also emerged from the 2012 Questionnaire on the “State of the OFM Order”. How hard it is for religious who are consumed with self maintenance and creating a safe, secure, and ‘luxurious’ environment to imagine that Franciscan evangelical life is not about security, stability (the 4<sup>th</sup> vow, in case you did not know), stagnation, about allowing the dream they once received, the vocation they once nurtured, to die. The words from the song “I Dreamed a Dream” come to mind:

“I dreamed a dream in time gone by, when hope was high, and life worth living.  
I dreamed that love would never die, I dreamed that God would be forgiving.  
Then I was young and unafraid, and dreams were made and used and wasted.  
There was no ransom to be paid, no song unsung, no wine untasted.  
But the tigers come at night, with their voices soft as thunder,  
As they tear your hope apart, as they turn your dreams to shame.” (Anne Hathaway, *Les Miserables*)

### **Recovering the Dream: On Discernment**

When I was provincial in St. Louis (11 months of service), I met with a friar who had been doing the same service in the province for more than 25 years. I asked him to embark on something entirely new and different, one requiring that he learn Spanish, share life with a faith community composed to a large measure of Catholics from Mexico, and be open to eating the food, drinking the beverages, and enjoying the sounds of music of the people among whom we have being asked to go. His first response was that of anger. He asked me: “How could you take me away from the work I have been doing, doing so well, and from the life I have built for myself? This was less a question than an indictment against my decision to ask him to move on to a new fraternity and ministry. I explained to him all of the reasons why I thought he was the right person at the right time for what I believed would become the right fit for him, for the friars among whom he would live, and also for the people of God. He asked for time to ‘discern’ his response. A week later, he came to me and presented a laundry list of motives for not accepting the change of ministry and fraternity. In the end, he accepted the change, more out of a sense of obedience to his superior rather welcoming new opportunities for fraternal living and evangelization, for further growth for

his religious vocation. I met him three years later after moving to Rome to serve the Order. He came and gave me a big hug. “Thank you! I did not trust you, nor did I believe the new work and fraternity to where I was to be assigned would be good for me. I must tell you, I have never been happier in my 40 years of Franciscan life. The new fraternity and ministry have opened my eyes to see just how old and self-centered I had become.”

**Mark 1:14: “After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God”**

The Gospel of Mark concludes the initial stage of Jesus’ formation/conversion process with movement. For Mark, conversion to God’s kingdom agenda is initiated by God, received by the disciple – in this case, his beloved Son – shared among the disciples with the Master (rabbi Jesus), and proclaimed to the world. For the evangelist, the formative process towards discipleship in the community of Jesus promotes unity with God, fraternal communion as an expression of this spiritual unity, and the desire and responsibility to communicate to others the good news one has received and in which one has placed one’s trust. In each of the Gospels, an explicit link is made between movement towards God, towards fellow members ‘on the way’ (in the community of disciples), and movement outward towards the world. There is no authentic evangelization without unity and communion lived with God and among the disciples. But neither can one come to a deeper understanding of who God is, and the nature of God’s mission, unless and until we join in the movement. Each contributes to the completion of the other, leading to deeper faith and spiritual maturity, and to a deeper understanding and acceptance of one’s own humanity and that of others. Perhaps it is for this reasons that the OFMs have discovered the direct link between Fraternity and Mission. The documents of the Order speak of all communities of friars as “Fraternities-in-Mission”. There is no disconnect between living the radical life of discipleship in Jesus Christ, being a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, and being a member of the Order of Friars Minor. All converge in the experience of evangelical life when it is lived as a continuation, a deepening, of the primary call to be missionary disciples (Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 24, 40, et passim).

The same that can be said about discipleship in the community of Jesus can also be said about religious life. Movement is absolutely essential for growth in vocational awareness, for deepening one’s identity, and for experiencing greater freedom to live the Gospel life with love, peace, and joy. But one might ask, “How is this movement to be achieved?” Here, a healthy dose of creativity, spontaneity, and also risk-taking is necessary. Programs involving ‘stages’ or ‘flex mission’ or ‘overseas training programs’ (OTPs) are helpful instruments. They promote an opening of one’s life to new realities, new cultures, new languages, thus making a contribution to increasing one’s capacity to live ‘inter-culturally’, and I might add ‘inter-generationally’. These latter two are becoming ever more urgent as religious Orders/Congregations take on a more diversified face, welcoming new religious members from anywhere in the world, and as our provinces – at least those in the US – continue to experience aging and diminishment. All of these initiatives should be seen as tools vital for lifelong formation. No age requirements hold: all are welcome to apply!

True evangelical movement involves linking our lives to that of Jesus, to the lives of the poor and marginalized (cf. Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 179ff.), to the Church, and to our fellow religious.) This movement opens our horizons to new possibilities for living the Gospel and the evangelical counsels with a new freedom, the ‘freedom to love’ of which St. Paul speaks in his letter to the Galatians 5: 13. This is precisely what Pope Francis has in mind by insisting on the

need for the Church, for all disciples, and for us religious, to 'go out' – '*uscire*' – to become a missionary community of God in service to all of humanity and to creation.

"I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life. More than by fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear of remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us: "Give them something to eat" (*Mk 6:37*)" (EG 49).

### **Conclusion: On 'Waking Up the World'**

I must apologize for four shortcomings in what I have tried to share with you. First, I have formulated many of my reflections bearing in mind the members of the Order of Friars Minor for whom I bear a special responsibility. I also had in mind my brother Capuchins and Conventuals with whom I share both an effective and affective affinity and charismatic identity. My intention was not to exclude any other of the Franciscan groups present and with whom I share a close affinity. Rather, I sought to talk about something about which I think I know something about without inventing or projecting images about Franciscan groups of which I know very little. Still, I believe that many elements that apply to the OFMs and other members of the First Order and TOR also find resonance in the lived experience of other religious congregations of Franciscans.

Second, much of the language used by the Church and by our respective Orders and Congregations, formulated in 'Ratio formationis' documents, focus attention not only on the theological, spiritual, and ecclesial dimensions of formation to religious life but also provide a series of recommendations for how to promote lifelong conversion, the goal of all formation to religious life. Rather than simply repeat what is contained in these documents, I have opted to risk directly engaging with the events and theological significance of Jesus' lifelong conversion to the mission of God's kingdom presented by the evangelist Mark, and to which I have added my own creative flair. The reason I have taken this approach is that I am convinced the 'seeds' or essential elements for understanding the mission, scope, and methods for life formation towards union with God, with the brothers and all other human beings, and with all of creation are present in the opening chapter of the Gospel of St. Mark. If I were accustomed to act in a more classical manner, which I am not, I probably would have taken the image of the Transfiguration that guides St. John Paul II's reflection on the meaning and mission of religious life (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consacrata*). *Mea culpa!* It also is a valid reflection and opens to us other insights into the mystery of vocation and lifelong formation.

My third shortcoming: I have opted not to include in this presentation issues related to sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable peoples for the simple reason that it merits a particular attention that goes beyond the scope of the time allotted to me at this symposium. Our public commitment to the evangelical counsels and the search for integrity of life and mission require that we give

specific attention to life long formation for responsible living, as a matter of faith and justice. Thus, all programs of formation should integrate tools and methods for helping each of us integrate our sexuality and affective needs in a way that promotes healthy, holistic relationships among the members of our respective Orders and Congregations, and in all of our relationships that are created and nurtured through our missionary, apostolic activities.

A fourth shortcoming: I regret that my thoughts and recommendations might not be bold enough to help us move in a direction that not only respond to the call of Pope Francis to “Wake up the world” (cf. Pope Francis, *Catholic Herald*, January 3, 2014:

<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2014/01/03/key-quotes-from-the-popes-meeting-with-the-union-of-superiors-general/>) but that actually will convince us that in order to be passionate and faithful missionary disciples, we must embrace a way of living the Gospel that can actually render our hearts malleable, revitalize the quality of interpersonal relationships - a quality fraternal experience of life that is life-giving, and transform our apostolic/missionary outreach into a collaborative, two-by-two experience capable of reflecting a model of discipleship that is forged ‘on the road’ of daily shared life.

Parenthetically, at the last OFM General Chapter (2015), a proposal was brought forward by a number of brothers from entities in Latin America seeking to include in our General Statutes a recommendation that, where possible, our houses of initial formation, including novitiate, be located in neighborhoods where the inhabitants experience all forms of exclusion, deprivation, poverty, violence, and dehumanization. The motive behind this proposal was not based exclusively on the evangelical value of poverty and the promotion of simplicity of life in response to our charism and the call of Pope Francis for religious to embrace the way of the poor Christ by association with those who are excluded, although this certainly had some influence. Rather, the brothers’ call to move formation houses to the ‘peripheries’ was an invitation to radicalize our way of life and systems of formation, further enabling the young candidates, novices, and temporary professed to be afforded an experience of coming to a deeper awareness of their dependence on God alone, and interdependence on the brothers of the local fraternity, Province/entity, and Order. Personally, I welcome such initiatives on condition that *ALL of the brothers* of the Province/entity accompany and invest in such a move. It is one thing to send young lambs to the slaughter. It is another to send the ‘fatted rams’.

In whatever direction our efforts take us, I remain convinced that we can change the way we think about the formative conversion process in which all of us are engaged. We can find new and more effective ways to promote the active participation of all of our fellow religious/friars in giving specific shape and content to this process. And we can help one another discover and articulate the narrative unity that gives shape to our identity, offering redemptive possibilities to the way of life we have received as gift from God to which we are willing to commit all of our energies, in the best and the worst of times. Perhaps when we have done all we can to move ourselves in these directions, placing the crucified Lord Jesus at the center, we will discover that in fact, we already are acting as “Witnesses of a different way of doing things, of acting, of living!” I still ‘dream the dream’! Do you?

**Stewarding the Grace of *Fraternitas*:**  
**Living Out the Franciscan Charism of “Being Brothers” in Service of God’s Mission**  
**Margaret Eletta Guider, OSF**

*“And after the Lord gave me some brothers,  
no one showed me what I had to do,  
but the Most High Himself revealed to me  
that I should live according to the pattern of the Gospel.”*  
*The Testament, 14*<sup>1</sup>

***Introduction***

The presentation that I was invited to give was entitled  
*“Mission through the lens of evangelization.”*

The presentation was to be guided by the question:  
*“How does evangelization prod us to listen and respond to the world?”*

But the more I thought about it  
the more I realized the following:

Good title.

Good question.

But ... before we talk about mission and evangelization,  
some prior reflection on brotherhood is in order.

As I pondered the words of the *Testament*,  
I became attentive to the fact that it was only *after* the Lord gave brothers to Francis  
that the Most High God revealed to him that  
he should live according to a form of life based on the Gospel.  
His experience of call did not unfold as many might think:  
commitment to the evangelical life first,  
and relationship with the brothers second.

Informed by this insight,  
I realized  
that perhaps a more adequate and appropriate way  
to reflect upon your participation in *God’s mission* - the *missio Dei* -  
is not through the lens of evangelization,  
but rather,  
through the lens of brotherhood  
or to be more precise  
the grace of *fraternitas*

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<sup>1</sup> Francis of Assisi, *The Saint: Early Documents*, Volume I, edited by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J.A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv., and William J. Short, O.F.M. (New York: New City Press, 1999) 125.

that uniquely Franciscan missionary charism of  
“being brothers” in the Church and the World.

We know from *The Testament* that Francis received this grace of *fraternitas*.

We also know that he stewarded this grace  
in the company of those he embraced as brothers  
in times of exuberant joy and in times profound grief.  
For Francis, both in the best of times and in the worst,  
*fraternitas* was the foundation for living the evangelical life.  
As the Jesuits would say:  
it was his “way of proceeding” in the service of God’s mission.

***And What About You? Disposing Yourself to the Grace of Fraternitas***

Following the example of the General Minister,  
my Franciscan brother and my former classmate, Michael Perry,  
I, too, will turn to Scripture as a starting point for reflection.  
[On this occasion of Catholic Theological Union’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,  
this is definitely a hallmark of our shared CTU formation for mission].

Mindful of the *Parable of the Talents*,  
always a thought-provoking point of reference from the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 25:14-30),  
I invite you to take a few moments to think about the three servants  
as examples of *stewardship*  
particularly for you as brothers  
upon whom the grace of *fraternitas*  
- the *charism* of brotherhood -  
*has been, is and will continue to be*  
poured out  
through the Spirit’s holy manner of working.

There are those servants who are faithful  
yet fearful about losing the little they have been given  
and overly cautious to their own detriment.

There are those servants who are creative,  
doubling the portion that they have received,  
but ever-conscious of being endowed with less than others.

And, there are those servants who,  
in their exercise of fidelity *and* creativity  
with what they have been given and what they have received

are neither afraid of risk-taking  
nor constrained by the human tendency to be diminished by comparisons.

But before you start identifying with one of the three examples  
individually – in terms of yourself

or

collectively - in terms of the fraternity to which you belong,

I urge you to consider what these examples reveal  
about the interactive dynamics of stewardship  
and the ways in which the grace of *fraternitas*

- no matter in what measure it is divinely given or humanly received -  
is buried, doubled or quintupled.

### ***Setting the Grace(s) of Fraternitas at the Service of God's Mission***

Drawing upon the *Writings of St. Bonaventure* on grace,  
I invite you to consider the following passage:

“Therefore, if you wish to have the love of the Son  
and of the originating Principle,  
and of the Gift that is the Holy Spirit,  
***dispose yourself for grace.***”

Bonaventure then goes on to question:  
“*Whence does grace take its origins?*”

And in response to the question, he answers:

“I say that it has its beginning with the Father of lights,  
through the incarnate Word,  
through the crucified Word,  
and through the inspired Word.”<sup>2</sup>

Taking these insights from Bonaventure as a framework for reflection,  
I would like to explore three ways in which the grace of *fraternitas*  
– as experienced in the life and witness of Francis of Assisi –  
and in your own  
may be understood as an *extraordinary* charism  
given for service in God's mission.

To the extent that  
every brother  
– by virtue of his profession –

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<sup>2</sup> Works of St. Bonaventure, *Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (1.8), introduction and translation by Zachary Hayes, O.F.M., notes by Robert J. Karris, O.F.M. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publication, 2008) 35.

disposes himself to this grace of *fraternitas*  
each one must render a response  
to the generative question  
that I put before you today:

What kind of stewards of this grace of *fraternitas* have you been?

What kind of stewards are you now?

And perhaps, most importantly,  
what kind of stewards of this grace do you desire to become?  
As together you contemplate  
not only your respective futures  
in the service of God's mission  
but your *shared* future  
a future that is unfolding  
right here, right now.

"Behold," says the Lord,

doing something new!  
Now it springs forth,  
do you not perceive it?" (Is 43:19)

"I am

Since I have raised these questions,  
it is only fair that I offer some ways of approaching them.  
Returning to Bonaventure's insights,  
I propose the following framework for reflection.

The Grace of *Fraternitas* and the Incarnate Word:  
The Evangelizing Mission of Being Open to the New

*The Grace of Fraternitas* and the Crucified Word:  
The Evangelizing Mission of Confronting the Mystery of Evil

*The Grace of Fraternitas* and the Inspired Word:  
The Evangelizing Mission of Participating in the Mystery of the Reign of God

**I. The Grace of *Fraternitas* and the Incarnate Word:  
Embracing the Mystery of God  
and the Evangelizing Mission of Being Open to the New**

*“Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that  
he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus:  
We no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’  
but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’.”  
Evangelii Gaudium, 120<sup>3</sup>*

When it comes to using the language of “mission” and  
arriving at a precise definition of the term,  
it seems there are as many ways as there are desires.

For our purposes today,  
it is my understanding that the term mission  
does *not refer to something the Church does or something that Franciscans do.*  
Rather, the word mission refers to the very being of God –  
the Triune God who is God-for-Us.<sup>4</sup>

Mission understood in this Trinitarian sense originates in the *MISSIO DEI*  
– God’s mission –

As the mystery of the God is revealed in the  
sending of the Son to be *God-with-Us* (Jn  
1:14; Is 7:14; Mt 1:23; Jn 1:14), so,  
too, the grace of *fraternitas* is revealed in the Incarnate Word,  
as Jesus, our Brother (Heb 2:10-18).

*As bearers of the divine image and likeness,*  
we are called to *participate* in God’s mission,  
ever mindful of the fact that your God is a God who acts in history.  
As participants in God’s mission

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (24 November 2013) 120. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

<sup>4</sup> See Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

we, too, are called to act in history as disciples of Jesus Christ  
and as missionaries gifted by the Spirit and  
sent to proclaim God's Word  
as a "community of missionary disciples."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 24

As a protagonist of missionary discipleship,  
Pope Francis has made the concept a hallmark of his papacy  
and a source of inspiration for engaging the missiological imagination  
of local churches throughout the world.

Mindful of the signs of the times,  
Pope Francis has emphasized the critical importance  
of specific aspects of formation  
in the lives of missionary disciples:  
to embrace a vocational identity,  
to experience a grace-filled sense of purpose  
and to sustain a passionate commitment  
to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world  
through the evangelizing mission of presence and encounter  
characterized by joy.

.As brothers responding to the call to participate in God's mission  
have been challenged by your own documents  
as well as countless ecclesial documents  
consider the ways in which your ministries of presence and encounter  
must be at the heart of your particular witness to the Gospel.

By way of one concrete example,  
I encourage you to think about the young women you have accompanied  
in the discovery of their Franciscan hearts  
and their vocations as missionary disciples  
through *FrancisCorps*, *Franciscan Mission Service* and *Cap Corps*.

Over the years,  
I have had the privilege of teaching some of them  
I am conscious of the fact that  
joining a congregation like my own,  
of which I am one of the younger members in North America,  
holds little attraction or appeal.  
Moreover, their primary bonds of Franciscan affection  
are with you -  
with your provinces, your friars, your histories and your particular charisms  
charisms that they know and love  
and with which they have roots.

As the Synod on Youth, Vocation and Discernment concludes this week,  
we are all urged to think about vocations to FranciscanClarean life  
in the United States and other places in the world.

With this in mind,  
I ask you to think about the initiative of Francis on Clare's behalf,  
and similarly, about the initiative of Fr. Pamfilo of Magliano in the 1850s  
as he facilitated entrance into Franciscan life  
for a few young women who later became the Allegany Franciscans,  
and a few other young immigrant women who later became the Joliet Franciscans.  
He took a risk and opened himself to the new.  
Might you consider doing something similar?

Returning to Italy a few years later,  
Father Pamfilo trusted that these foundations were not his work,  
but the work of the Spirit.  
He did what was his to do.  
And, he trusted that God would act.

A century later,

quite

by chance and more work of the Spirit,  
these two congregations would meet in Goiás, Brazil,  
to embark on something new-  
not alone, but in the company of  
friars from the Holy Name province, the Society of the Atonement,  
the Poor Clares from Wappinger Falls,  
New York, the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother from Wisconsin,  
the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor from Ohio,  
the Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph from Hamburg, New York,  
and an OFS diocesan priest from Camden, New Jersey,  
formed by the TOR friars in Pennsylvania,  
found themselves involved in an evangelizing mission  
of presence and encounter.<sup>6</sup>  
that over time has given rise to new communities, monasteries and provinces in Brazil.  
Amidst the life processes of beginnings and endings,  
of flourishing and completion,  
of legacy and leave-taking,  
this history underscores  
one intuition and imperative:

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<sup>6</sup> Margaret Eletta Guider, "U.S. Franciscan Missionaries in Goiás, Brazil (1943-2013): Leave-Taking and Legacy," ACHA Annual Meeting, Marriott Wardman Park, Washington, D.C., January 4, 2014.

***You must be open to the new!***

The new that awaits you, like the Reign of God, is already in your midst.  
It is both “already” and “not yet.”

When it comes to embracing the new that God places before you,  
consider how many times in the course of your life  
you have pondered the words from the Prophet Isaiah 55:8-9 –

*“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,” declares our God.  
As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”*

When these words, like ardent pieces of charcoal,  
were placed not on the tongue of the prophet Isaiah,  
he knew in his heart,  
that our Most High God was not kidding.

“How long have you been following Jesus on the way,  
and still you do not comprehend?” (Jn 14:9)

***New means new,  
not just an updated version of something old!***

**II. The Grace of *Fraternitas* and the Crucified Word:  
The Evangelizing Mission of Confronting the Mystery of Evil**

*“Go and repair my house, for as you see, it is falling into ruin.”  
Celano, Second Life, 10*

What does it mean for you as brothers  
to break open the Crucified Word of God,  
to confront the mystery of evil  
and make meaning of its significance for your lives  
and the lives of others?

Last year, I met with one of my former students,  
who now is in a position of leadership within his religious institute.  
At the time he was dealing with the ongoing consequences of the sexual abuse crisis  
that were affecting his own congregation directly.

He said to me, “This is something for which you never prepared me.”

For days, I pondered his words.  
He was correct.  
Rarely was reflection on the *mysterium iniquitatis* a part of the curriculum.

As witnesses to the tragic consequences and unrelenting after-shocks  
of the phenomenon of abuse  
you know all too well  
the countless ways in which  
“this *mysterium iniquitatis* that continues to run its course.  
Indeed, it is a soul-devouring dragon (Rev 12:17)  
that has yet to be slain or definitively tamed,  
a beast that continues to be stronger than the chains put in place to bind it,  
a nefarious force that vomits raging torrents of life-threatening waters throughout the earth.  
“Yet, as you know from the Book of Revelation,  
the soul-devouring dragon of the apocalyptic vision  
is not slain, chained or tamed by human forces,  
yet, we know how the story ends  
and that ultimately the power of heaven prevails (Rev 20:10).”  
A vision of a new heaven earth is revealed, and with it,  
the promise that God is with God’s people,  
promising to wipe every tear from their eyes,  
promising that there will be no more death, or mourning, or crying or pain,  
for the former things have passed away (Rev 2:3-4).”  
“For all of those affected by the phenomenon of sexual abuse in whatever form,  
living into this new vision may seem impossible  
as the anguished question “Where is God?”  
continues to echo in the minds and hearts of so many.  
For those of you entrusted with the responsibility  
for forming a new generation of brothers to serve the People of God,  
it is essential that you accompany them  
in the process of learning to live with this haunting question  
and with the dangerous memories that gave rise to it.  
At the same time, you also must create the conditions  
that will enable them to find the river, the water,  
the tree of life, with all of its fruits, and especially its leaves (Rev. 22: 1-2),  
that they may be the brothers the People of God need - and deserve.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the Crucified Word invites you to do more than see and judge;  
it requires you to act,  
to make connections and to put into practice  
what you say you believe:  
that participation in God’s mission is central to your lives,

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Eletta Guider, Conclusão do “O Dragão Devorador de Almas,” *Formação: Desafios Morais*, ed. Ronaldo Zacharias, et al. (Sao Paulo: Paulus, 2018) 279. [English translation: Conclusion of “The Soul-devouring Dragon.”]

that every vocation involves the cost of discipleship,  
and that every abuse of power,  
including the power to neglect,  
is a failure to adhere to the prophetic example of Jesus  
for whom power is rightly understood as the service of love.

As Pope Francis frequently reminds us all,  
the vocation of the missionary disciple is demanding.

Inevitably, it involves the experience of having to  
recognize, shoulder and carry  
the weight of reality,<sup>8</sup>  
to be witnesses, and if necessary, martyrs, to be  
messengers of reality,<sup>9</sup>  
and ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:11-21),<sup>10</sup>  
especially in circumstances where people's confidence in God and others  
has been eroded by an overwhelming sense of affliction.

And yet, amidst the shadows and darkness,  
inherent in the vocation of the missionary disciple  
is the capacity to identify with the person of Jesus Christ,  
and to know through our experiences of encounter with the divine presence,  
that despite all evidence to the contrary,  
you are not alone.  
the Most High God has given you brothers.

For our God, in whose image and likeness we have been created,  
is a God who truly is God-With-Us.  
And, herein lies the mystery of what it means to imitate Christ,  
and to follow in the footsteps  
the One who is willing to share in the sufferings of others  
for the sake of love.  
Faced as you may be with the  
dangerous memories of the past,  
uncertainties about the present  
and anxieties about the future,  
do you as brothers  
strengthen and encourage one another  
to place your trust in the One who has called you by name.

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<sup>8</sup> See Kevin F. Burke, S.J., *The Ground beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuría* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000) 127.

<sup>9</sup> See Michael E. Lee, *Revolutionary Saint: The Theological Legacy of Oscar Romero* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2018) 159-161.

<sup>10</sup> See Robert J. Schreiter, C.P.P.S. *The Ministry of Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998).

How does the grace of *fraternitas*  
enable you  
to find the courage and humility needed  
to remain steadfast in your confidence  
in God's grace and mercy  
so that you may be witnesses to truth  
and  
ambassadors of reconciliation?

**III. The Grace of *Fraternitas* and the Inspired Word:  
The Evangelizing Mission of Ultimate Formation for the sake of the Reign of God**

When was the first time that you passionately proclaimed:

*“This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart”?*  
(Thomas of Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*, IX:22)<sup>11</sup>

And now for my second question:  
When was the most recent time?

As brothers  
you live in an expansive present where witnesses to the Gospel Way of life  
and Franciscan participation in God’s mission are needed more than ever.

Your unfolding future carries with it one guarantee -  
with every day that passes you are one step closer to completing your journey home to God.

Mindful of that fact,  
here is a question that I ask you to hold in your hearts today:

*What time is it?*  
The answer is a simple, yet challenging one:

It is time to wake up  
and wake up the world.

At the beginning of your Franciscan journey as brothers,  
you were invited into a process of so-called “initial formation”  
followed by a process of so-called “ongoing formation” -  
for life in mission: prayer, fraternity and ministry.  
But when was the last time you heard a brother speak of  
“ultimate formation” for the sake of the Reign of God?

When Bonaventure ascended the mountain of LaVerna, where  
he wrote *The Soul’s Journey into God*,<sup>12</sup> he  
was not laying out a Thirteenth century step-by-step Trip-Tic  
or providing a medieval GPS mapping to assist souls in finding their way home to God.  
Rather, he was affirming that our life is an ascent to God,  
a process that is not something we are able to undertake,  
control or bring to completion on our own –

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<sup>11</sup> Francis of Assisi, *The Saint: Early Documents*, Volume I, 201.

<sup>12</sup> *Bonaventure - The Soul’s Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis*, translation and introduction by Ewert Cousins, preface by Ignatius Brady, O.F.M. (Maywah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1978) 51-116.

“God must pull you up.”<sup>13</sup>

And you, for your part,  
must be open to the graces and demands of this “being pulled up” (Mt 14:22-33),  
precisely by remembering those experiences that are foundational  
to your ultimate *formation* for the *missio Dei*.

As those brothers who have gone before you in faith know  
from the vantage point of eternity,  
the journey of union with God cannot be understood narrowly  
as the “end-of- life” journey in service of God’s Mission.

Rather, it must be understood for what it truly is -  
a daring journey in service of God’s Mission  
that requires you to “live with eyes wide open”  
to live joyfully and hopefully  
as you move throughout life,  
regardless of whether you are in the first or second chapter of your lives  
or moving into the third and fourth chapters.

For those who may be wondering  
“When exactly does this leg of the journey begin?”  
I would say that the experience of ultimate formation  
in service of God’s Mission  
begins the day that you recognize  
by divine inspiration  
that you are one day closer to bringing to completion  
all that has been  
and all that continues to be yours to do

*Ultimate formation* for service in God’s Mission involves remembering  
that you have come from God  
and preparing yourselves for your return to God.  
It involves the kind of intentionality, watchfulness, trust,  
desire, joy and intimacy  
that leads to ever deeper love.

In sum, it involves remaining attentive  
to the many ways in which God is *pulling you up*  
to ever greater participation in the *missio Dei* and  
drawing you into an experience of ever deeper union -  
with the One whom you seek, the One in whom you hope,

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<sup>13</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, “Love sees further than reason,” Catechesis given in Rome, March 17, 2010.  
<http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/love-sees-further-than-reason>

the One for whom you long, the One through whom you rise,  
the One you receive, the One in whom you exalt,  
and the One to whom you finally cling.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

As brothers of the First Order and the Third Order Regular,  
do not underestimate  
how much  
your common witness is needed  
by the entire FranciscanClarean family.  
Not only is it critical to your futures  
It is critical to all of our futures.

May you remain attentive  
to the Incarnate Word,  
the Crucified Word and the Inspired Word.

May you be enchanted by the wonder of life and possibility,  
transformed by the *pathos* of human suffering and vulnerability  
and  
moved by the power of divine inspiration.

And may your inner capacity to receive the grace of *fraternitas*  
continue to be stretched and enlarged  
as you cultivate – across the life span - a genuine *desire*  
to steward in *faithful* and *creative* ways  
this grace of *fraternitas*  
in the service of God's mission.

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<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Saint Bonaventure, *The Enkindling of Love (The Triple Way)*, III.C.8, edited and arranged by William I. Joffe (Paterson, New Jersey: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1956).

## **Liquidity and the Abyss: Lifelong Theological Formation for U.S. Franciscans**

Daniel P. Horan, OFM, PhD  
*Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology and Spirituality  
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, IL*

### **Introduction**

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak at this important event in which we explore together themes relating to lifelong formation for Franciscan men within the particular context of the United States. While our respective branches on the Franciscan family tree may look from the outside to vary one from the next, reflecting certain variations in habit and constitution, the core of our shared *vita evangelica* (“Gospel Life”) and the lifeblood that flows like sap throughout is the very same and shared tradition launched by Francis and Clare of Assisi eight centuries ago, and which serves to maintain our diverse unity.

When invited to present some points of reflection with you today, I was told two key things. First, I should focus on the theological trends, challenges, and hopes of our time that are perhaps overlooked in many formation settings (and even some academic ones) and yet ought to be recognized and attended to by Franciscans today. Second, I was to keep my remarks to around 25 minutes. Period. Both of these are formidable requests; the latter may in fact be the most difficult.

Given the time constraints, I have organized my remarks into major two parts. Part One is a look at our contemporary context, as well as social and theological landscape. It is, as it were, an exercise in naming the “signs of our times” as *Gaudium et Spes* describes it or the initial “seeing” or “recognition” step of the “See, Judge, Act” methodology outlined by John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra*.<sup>1</sup> Part Two is where I name two particular theological themes that I see largely unaddressed today and propose them to you as loci for lifelong Franciscan formation. These two themes are not meant to be exclusive, but are presented as illustrations of pressing theological questions that we ought to recognize, name, and begin to address from within our particular Franciscan tradition. It is my hope that our processing and discussion of these questions might lead to further emphasis on these and similar topics moving forward.

### **The Context of Now: Liquidity, the Abyss, and the Decolonial Turn**

The Second Vatican Council’s “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (*Gaudium et Spes*) identified a central task of Christian discipleship, stating: “the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (no. 4). This activity, described famously by John XXIII as the “seeing” or “perceiving” act of the reduction of theological principles to pragmatic action, requires that we take a clear and sober look at what I will call “the context of now.” *Gaudium et Spes* further

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<sup>1</sup> See Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (December 7, 1965). Available online at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html); and Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, On Christianity and Social Progress (May 15, 1961). Available online at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_15051961\\_mater.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html)

explains this urgent dimension: “Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, [the church] can respond to the perennial questions which [women and] men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics” (no. 4).

In other words, it is necessary for us to make sense of the context in which the Franciscan family now stands in order to understand anything about the theological themes that we must consider. This is where I draw on the metaphorical imagery of “liquidity” and “the abyss.”

It has become customary throughout the second-half of the twentieth century to describe our historical, intellectual, and cultural milieus as “postmodern.” The term—admittedly ambiguous or at least without a consensus definition—sought to capture the fractured nature of our individual and collective identities. It is marked by what the French philosopher and sociologist Jean-François Lyotard famously summarized as a general “incredulity towards metanarratives.”<sup>2</sup> While perhaps useful as a delimiter of epochal time, the term “postmodern” has come under scrutiny by various thinkers for its inherent ambiguity. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman proposed another descriptor for the context of now.<sup>3</sup> He called it “liquid modernity.”

Drawing on the standard states of matter as classically defined by natural science, Bauman noted that the modern era (marked by the so-called “turn to the subject,” celebrating the “triumph of reason and science,” and narrating a *telos* of human progress) was best likened to a solid. Solids are stable, static, unchanging, unmovable, hold their shape under stress, are immobile, and permanent. By contrast, the age in which we find ourselves is less “post-modern,” Bauman contends, because we are in many ways still living in the shadow of modernity and exist within the reality that was understood to be more solid or frozen. What we experience now is the “melting” of that stalwart modernity. As Bauman explains, “‘fluidity’ or ‘liquidity’ [are] fitting metaphors when we wish to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways *novel*, phase in the history of modernity.”<sup>4</sup> Bauman contends that early modernity is best understood as that time and effort in which earlier “melting” of standard metanarratives and cultural presuppositions were accomplished in order to make room for replacements that were intended to be even-more solid, integrative, and lasting. What distinguishes our time—that of *liquid* modernity—is that the “task of constructing new and better order to replace the old and defective one is not presently on the agenda.” Bauman goes on to explain:

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<sup>2</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup> As with any public intellectual, the late Professor Bauman is not without his critics, both intellectual and personal. Regarding the latter, it is worth noting that some have taken issue with Bauman’s admission of participating as a bureaucrat in the Communist Government of Poland as a young man. While I do not wish to make a personal judgment about the quality of Bauman’s character or political affiliations, I do want to acknowledge this rather public aspect of his early adult life. For more on his biography, see Vanessa Gera, “Zygmunt Bauman, sociologist who wrote identity in the modern world, dies at 91,” *Associated Press* (January 9, 2017), available online at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/zygmunt-bauman-sociologist-who-wrote-identity-in-the-modern-world-dies-at-91/2017/01/09/ba6f821e-d6b2-11e6-b8b2-cb5164beba6b\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.4317afe4a68d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/zygmunt-bauman-sociologist-who-wrote-identity-in-the-modern-world-dies-at-91/2017/01/09/ba6f821e-d6b2-11e6-b8b2-cb5164beba6b_story.html?utm_term=.4317afe4a68d)

<sup>4</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 2.

The “melting of solids,” the permanent feature of modernity, has therefore acquired a new meaning, and above all has been redirected to a new target—one of the paramount effects of that redirection being the dissolution of forces which could keep the question of order and system on the political agenda. The solids whose turn has come to be thrown into the melting pot and which are in the process of being melted at the present time, the time of fluid modernity, are the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions—the patterns of communication and co-ordination between individually conducted life policies on the one hand and the political actions of human collectivities on the other.<sup>5</sup>

The sense of our liquid times—that which bears the weight of history and time and space, but slips through our proverbial fingers when we attempt to grasp it firmly—is one felt by women and men around the world in various ways as a result of the increased globalization. The effects of globalization are not universally experienced singularly, for there are perceptible gaps between the economic, political, cultural, and ecclesial winners and losers. Nevertheless, the de-solidification of our contexts is, to some degree, a widespread phenomenon of our time.

So, what does this mean? Bauman suggests that, among other features, “These days patterns and configurations are no longer ‘given,’ let alone ‘self-evident’; there are just too many of them, clashing with one another and contradicting one another’s commandments, so that each one has been stripped of a good deal of compelling, coercively constraining powers.”<sup>6</sup> In some instances, the liquidity of our modern age is experienced in the form of that perennial ecclesial boogeyman known as “relativism.” Most often, it simply means that identities, cultures, meaning, value, and grounding is not presupposed or axiomatic. Whereas Karl Rahner described early modernity as like a “wintry season,” we might argue with Bauman that our context is now more akin to a “rainy season,” or even a “monsoon.” Meaning making in liquid modernity means always being in flux, not keeping shape for very long and subject to revision, especially in the wake of fast-paced technological and scientific discovery and near-instantaneous global communications.

If liquidity most readily describes the condition of our modern era and contemporary context, then I believe that the image of the “abyss” best describes the challenge before us theologically. The image of abyss is a deeply theological concept that finds its scriptural origin in Genesis 1:2 with the naming of the *tehom* over which the divine *Ruach Elohim* draws near at the outset of creation. Within that primordial context, there is chaos and uncertainty, disorder and confusion, lack of future and yet infinite potential. So too, our modern context—liquid as it may be—is distinguished by rapid change, chaos, uncertainty, the unknown, and yet bears unknown potential. Theologian An Yountae reminds us that the image of the abyss is not

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<sup>5</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 7.

merely raw chaos, but it “also becomes the womb of creative potential.”<sup>7</sup> I believe the language of the abyss is both descriptive and diagnostic for the enterprise of doing theology today.

Descriptively, there is in fact a gap or abyss between the reality of the lived experiences of most women and men in the world—including those within the Franciscan family—and the way that theological reflection has proceeded without prejudice for the shift from early modernity to its current liquid state. In other words, because so much of theology is presented as if the solid foundations of modernity have not melted and metanarratives remain axiomatic, there is a real impasse between what rises as the truly pressing theological and pastoral concerns of our time and the way we often articulate the faith. To borrow an apt set of categories from the Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan, too much of the way theology is understood and passed down within the tradition is in the “classicist” mode and does not adequately take into account “historical consciousness.”<sup>8</sup> A “classicist world-view” is a black-and-white way of approaching reality, seeking timeless, simple, and static answers to complex questions that deserve a more robust and nuanced response. “Historical-Mindedness,” on the other hand, is a handy term to denote recognition of the world’s complexity, the need for nuance in scholarly inquiry, and an appreciation for the fullness of understanding of our faith toward which we seek but of which we may never master. The latter aligns better with the state of liquid modernity in which we find ourselves today.

Diagnostically, the image of the abyss as “creative womb,” that space of being “in-between” where the creative work of God’s Spirit can take place, offers us a challenge and invitation. In order to overcome the abyss-as-impasse and do theology in an age of liquidity, we must shift our individual and collective focus from the status quo and repetition of an untenable “classicist” approach to God and the world toward, instead, other ways of knowing and interpreting ourselves, the rest of creation, and God. To this end, I suggest that what has been emerging in recent years as a “decolonial option” or “the decolonial turn” as a way of thinking about knowledge, interpretation, and practice offers us an important methodological starting point.<sup>9</sup>

There is not enough space here to do justice to the richness and development of decoloniality having risen to greater prominence as a deliberate hermeneutical approach in recent years.<sup>10</sup> In brief, as theorists Catherine Walsh and Walter D. Mignolo explain, decoloniality “is not a new paradigm or mode of critical thought. It is a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis.”<sup>11</sup> One of the key dimensions of a hermeneutic of decoloniality is the critical interpretation of standards of knowing and experiencing, which have been

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<sup>7</sup> An Yountae, *The Decolonial Abyss: Mysticism and Cosmopolitics from the Ruins* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 11.

<sup>8</sup> See Bernard Lonergan, “The Transition from a Classicist World-View to Historical-Mindedness,” in *A Second Collection: Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan*, eds. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 1-9.

<sup>9</sup> An, *The Decolonial Abyss*, 20.

<sup>10</sup> For more on this, see Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification,” in *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, eds. Mabel Moraña and Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 181-224; among others.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine E. Walsh and Walter D. Mignolo, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 5.

conscripted by singular forces that align with the expansion of the Western European colonial enterprise. To get at this reality, we might ask: what constitutes *real* or *legitimate* knowledge, science, or scholarship? Put in a pastoral context, we could also inquire about what is considered a *real* or *legitimate* devotion, Christian practice, or saint to be venerated? Oftentimes, the gatekeepers to what is considered *real* or *legitimate* are the same in both cases: those who maintain and deploy this colonial power, in broader society and in the church (that the history of colonization is a simultaneous and overlapping history of these two realities is not coincidental here).

Those who pursue a decolonial turn or embrace a decolonial option seek “conceptual instruments, other ways of theorizing, and other genealogies” in an effort to broaden what has typically been limited in terms of the “real” or “legitimate.”<sup>12</sup> Such a shift in prioritization of knowing and interpretation moves from the centers of power to the colonial peripheries, which is a move that is deeply *Franciscan* at its core, particularly when one considers the intentional location of *minoritas* as our grounding principle. It is a call for us to consider and privilege voices, experiences, and ways of knowing that are often overlooked and ignored. It demands humility on the part of those who have found themselves the gatekeepers of orthodoxy, tradition, and legitimacy. It recognizes that God’s Spirit is at work wherever God pleases and not just where those who have held power and authority say God is at work.

So, given that the context of now is liquid modernity, that we face an abyss, and that the constructive potential that exists in this moment includes a call to embrace the decolonial turn, I wish to highlight two theological areas we as Franciscans need to pay special attention to and engage in creative and constructive ways. The first is what I am calling a “theology of authenticity” and the second is “the meaning of the human person.” In what follows, I wish to merely propose these theological topics as a point of departure for our discussion and ongoing theological formation, which is both shaped by and ought to inform our pastoral praxis and community life in the *forma vitae* of Francis and Clare of Assisi.

## **Two Theological Loci: Authenticity and Personhood**

The first theological topic I wish to draw our attention to is something that has been a focal point of young adults from around the world as they articulated the pressing issues that face them ahead of the 2018 Synod of Bishops on Young People.<sup>13</sup> One of the most repeated themes that surfaced was the desire young adults had for what they named as an “authentic church,” marked by leaders who could admit mistakes, seek forgiveness, and accompany their younger sisters and brothers in their respective faith journeys with Christ. They address those in hierarchal leadership by name and exhort these leaders to be: “transparent, welcoming, honest, inviting, communicative, accessible, joyful and interactive.” To this end, the challenge that arises is an invitation for us to reflect on our own theology of leadership, holiness, and sin in the church—something all the more pressing in the wake of the recently revealed history of sexual abuse cover up witnessed to in the 2018 Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report.

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<sup>12</sup> Walsh and Mignolo, *On Decoloniality*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> For a fuller account and analysis of what will only be briefly explored here, see Daniel P. Horan, “Authenticity, Vocation, and the Risk of Faith: Hopes and Challenges for the 2018 Synod on Young People,” unpublished keynote addresses (September 2018) available online: <https://youtu.be/AGKfUdk8OeU> (Part I) and <https://youtu.be/m75GVVYejxY> (Part II).

What young people seem to be naming is the fact that we as a faith community, especially those of us in ecclesiastical leadership roles as men religious, are not working adequately enough to present the life of the Gospel authentically. We have too easily forgotten that one of the earliest and central Christian ecclesial claims is that the “church is holy,” and yet, as described in *Lumen Gentium*, it is “at the same time holy and always in need of being purified” (no. 8). The sinfulness of the church is seen in both the personal sins of its members, including its leaders, as well as collectively in the church’s historical complicity in various structural evils over the centuries.

This is where I believe the work of the Franciscan theological tradition is so important. Deeply human, rooted in an incarnational understanding of God’s humility and desire for creation, we celebrate the goodness of our created world and our human family while at the same time recognize the deeply fallen state of our affairs. The Franciscan tradition started as a medieval lay *penitential* movement after all! For this reason, we have never been willfully ignorant of the reality of our simultaneous sinfulness and justification in Christ. Other religious traditions within the Catholic Church are far less comfortable with this tension. Furthermore, this tension is heightened in our context by a cultural fear of litigation and the obsessive need “to be right” or win at all costs.

Rather than start our theological narratives with a presumption of ecclesial purity and perfection, perhaps we would do well to heed the wisdom of St. Francis in his *Admonitions* or look to the lesser-known and, at times, uncomfortable stories of our founder that center on his making mistakes, offending or sinning, and yet never shying away from the need to admit his wrongdoing, seek reconciliation, and offer penance. Rather than contribute to a misperception of moral weakness or ambiguity, such public practices convey to young adults and all people a more honest face of ecclesial leadership and pastoral ministry. We are not perfect. The Church, which is composed of all the baptized, the members of the Body of Christ, is *not perfect*. Why should we pretend to be otherwise?

Fear of further instability of mission and identity in the age of liquid modernity leads many church leaders and theologians to grasp onto the melting ice floes of a “classicist” worldview. But this attitude and practice only contributes to a deepening abyss between reality and falsity, between the church as some wish it were and the church as it really is. Embracing a decolonial option means that our starting point, as those in a privileged location of leadership and ministry, ought to be one of humility that allows us to hear the experiences and realities of the women and men—such as the young adults from around the globe—and follow their lead, learn from their wisdom, and empower their action.

The second theological topic I wish to name is that of personhood or, more directly, what does it mean to be human? The received tradition of theological anthropology rooted in an Aristotelian–Thomistic frame is breaking under the weight of historical, social, natural, psychological sciences, philosophy, and theology that have provided important and unassailable insights about what it means to be human over the last eight centuries. Furthermore, the lived experiences of women and men in various cultures and contexts at best do not confirm and more often contradict the proposals that have grounded so much of the way our magisterial teaching and theological reflection on humanity and morality have been articulated. I think we have to take seriously both our received tradition, but not merely repeat it with a kind of

fideism. Instead, we must have the epistemological, theological, and pastoral humility to receive input from the world around us that challenges the accuracy of our claims.

It is not accurate to cast the experience of sexual and gender diversity as “postmodern ideologies” bent on ushering in a radical relativism. It is not accurate to cast the differing experiences of embodiment and social location marked by race, class, ability, national status, and other characteristics as irrelevant to our understanding of Christian anthropology. It is not accurate to suggest that the reality of transgender persons is untrue or that gay and lesbian persons are merely electing to make a counter-cultural “choice” about sexual attraction. As the saying goes, just because something is “new to you” does not make it objectively “novel.” The compression of time and space in an age of globalization and liquid modernity has made access to and created platforms for the dissemination of diverse human experiences, which must be taken seriously and without prejudgment if we wish to authentically assert our belief in the inherent and unalienable dignity and value of each and every human person.

One of the pressing theological challenges for Franciscans in the twenty-first century is to engage these realities with a Christian theological response that is both grounded in the tradition but also applicable in light of the diversity of experiences, identities, and locations of the widely diverse members of the human family. The good news for us is that I believe there are in fact an abundance of pastoral and theological resources that form what I often call the “minority opinion” within the theological history of the last millennium. While Pope Leo XIII effectively elevated Thomas Aquinas as theologian *par excellence* to the near exclusion of other thinkers,<sup>14</sup> he did not eradicate their thought and writings. Bonaventure, Scotus, Olivi, Angela of Foligno, William of Ockham, and so many other luminaries have been under-resourced and offer perfectly orthodox yet alternative approaches to many of our most pressing concerns.<sup>15</sup>

Embracing a decolonial option prioritizes not only the often subjugated experiences and ways of knowing that belong to marginalized women and men, but it also prioritizes our historical hermeneutics, our way of interpreting and seeing—it challenges us to go back and look at what Scotus says differently than Thomas, what other figures say in a manner that has not been adequately heard to date. Embracing a decolonial option means starting *not with* a sense that we already have the answers, but that *we have yet to hear* the experiences and insights of a significant portion of our human family. Indeed if Anselm was right about the enterprise of theology, then we must be in the business of *seeking greater understanding* of the faith we profess—this is an ongoing responsibility.

As Franciscans concerned with lifelong theological formation, committed as we are to meet women and men where *they are* in the spirit of our itinerant tradition, we must be advocates personally and collectively for starting with the voices and experiences of those previously ignored or overlooked. We must ask ourselves: *whose experience counts* as the starting point for our theological reflection? Furthermore, we must be open to renewing our sense of theological anthropology that is true to our Christian faith but also is capacious enough

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<sup>14</sup> See Pope Leo XIII, *Aeterni Patris*, “On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy” (August 4, 1879). Available online at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_04081879\\_aeterni-patris.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris.html)

<sup>15</sup> This is something I address explicitly in my forthcoming book. See Daniel P. Horan, *Catholicity and Emerging Personhood: A Contemporary Theological Anthropology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2019).

to hold the experiences of LGBTQ persons, women of color, the poor and outcast, and all others as much as it has for the Euro-American, white, male cleric.

## **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, what I have been advocating here is a concerted shift in the way we approach theological questions and respond to the experiences and circumstances of the women and men of our time. Having recognized the state of our context as liquid and the abyss that stands between where we are and where theology has too often come from, we are challenged with the need for a renewed sense of authenticity and personhood. This raises a number of critical questions and leaves us with more queries than answers. I want to draw our attention to a few of these. Among the questions I wish to leave us to ponder and discuss include the following:

- With whom or with what do we begin our theologies?
- Whose voices are heard, whose experiences count?
- What does it mean to say that we are at once holy and sinful?
- What does authenticity look like in the church? How do we understand the human person?
- What role (if any) does the abundant diversity of the human experience play in our theological anthropology?
- How might we lead the way in modeling—within the church and beyond—a mode of studying and doing theology such that our pastoral practice is grounded in a coherent, sensible, and relevant understanding of the human person?

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Lifelong Formation for Franciscan Men in the U.S. in service of God's Mission  
Franciscan Symposium: October 25-27, 2018  
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**A BROTHERHOOD OF MISSIONARY DISCIPLES**

**Bro. John Corriveau, Capuchin**

**INTRODUCTION**

Prior to St. Francis, religious life in the Church was modelled on the early Christian community described in Acts 2:

*“And all who believed were together and had all things in common; ... And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes; they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.” (Acts 2: 44-47)*

Consecrated Life established on this model continues to radiate the living presence of God in our world.

However, Francis consciously chose another model for his brotherhood, namely, a **discipleship model**. St. Francis chose to model his Order on the life of Christ and his disciples:

*“After the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live after the pattern of the Holy Gospel.” (Test. 14)*

This assumes critical importance as we consider our Franciscan call to mission in the Church today. In **Joy of the Gospel**, Pope Francis extends this vision of discipleship to the entire Church, challenging us to be a missionary Church, a community of Missionary Disciples. I wish to consider the contribution which our Franciscan tradition brings to this challenge of forming the Church as a community of Missionary Disciples.

**THE EMBRACE OF FRANCISCAN BROTHERHOOD IS FIRST AND FOREMOST, THE EMBRACE OF JESUS CHRIST**

*“Consider, O human being, in what great excellence the Lord God has placed you, for he created and formed you to the image of his beloved Son according to the body and to his likeness according to the Spirit.” (Adm.V,1)*

St. Bonaventure helps us to understand the perspective of Francis: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God’s presence, and the Word was God.”* (Jn 1: 1). Reflecting on these opening words of John’s Gospel, Bonaventure teaches that the Word is the expressed “Image” of the Father: the total self-giving love of the Father is “imaged” in the Son. Reflecting on the next passage of John: *“Through him (the Word) all things came into being, and apart from him (the Word) nothing came to be”* (Jn 1: 3). Bonaventure states that the Word is the “exemplar” – the template or model – for all of creation. Furthermore, within creation, the human person is created to be an expressed “image” of the Word. Therefore, Bonaventure speaks of the human person as the “little word” of the Father. Jesus is the “Definitive Word” of the Father in the flesh – we are “little words of the Father” in the flesh. When this “little word” is spoken with clarity in and through our lives, God is made visible in the world.

St. Francis modelled this reality in an incredible manner. For Francis, imitation of Jesus was doing what Jesus did. Imitation of Jesus was living as Jesus lived, thinking as Jesus thought. It was all this and incredibly more! ***Francis sought to reproduce in his life the same relationship which Jesus lived with the Father!*** Imitation of Jesus was an invitation to enter into Trinitarian Relationship. Francis sought to be the “little word” modelled perfectly on the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. This is the profound significance of the third defining moment in the conversion experience of Francis:

*“From now on I will say freely, ‘Our Father who art in heaven’, and not ‘My Father Pietro di Bernardone”* (Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. 2, p. 251).

In imitation of Jesus, Francis seeks to give himself totally to his relationship with the Father: *“From now on I will say freely, ‘Our Father .. in heaven”*.

Jesus takes him by the hand and shows him the way. At his baptism by John, Jesus enters the Jordan River as the carpenter from Nazareth. This is a profound conversion experience in which the Father touches the passionate heart of Jesus, *“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”* (Mk 1: 11). Jesus is moved to the depth of his being and emerges from the Jordan as the living gospel of God. Jesus leads Francis along the same path of conversion! a short time after the event before the Bishop of Assisi, Francis hears the voice of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew sending his disciples two by two to preach the good news of penance and peace (cf. Matt 10). He is moved to the depth of his being. Just as the Father touched the passionate heart of Jesus at his Baptism, so Jesus, through his Word, touches the passionate heart of Francis:

*“This is what I want, for this I yearn, this is what I desire to do with all my heart!”*

In Francis we see the true meaning of conversion which is defined, not by what we leave behind, but by what we embrace! The conversion of Francis was his embrace of Jesus Christ. The consequence of his conversion was the abandonment of his life as the playboy of Assisi. In Francis we also see that conversion is not a once-and-for-all affair! His conversion continued

throughout life. At the end of his life he exhorts himself and all of us: ***“Let us now begin, brothers, because until now we have done nothing!”***

Pope Francis reminds us that ***“mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people”*** (EG, 268). If our Franciscan brotherhood is to be a force of mission and evangelization in our world, each of us must continually renew our passion for Jesus and his people.

In chapter Luke 6: 12 – 49, Jesus shows us the way. Jesus has just spent the night in prayer with his disciples on the mountain. At daybreak, he calls the disciples to him and appoints the 12 apostles. Jesus, then, leads them down the mountain and arrives at the plain where he encounters a multitude of people (cf. Lk 6:17). The scene is dramatic. The apostles and disciples, gathered around and behind him on the slope, witness his powerful presence among the people, whom Luke tells us, have come *“to hear him and be healed of their diseases; ...the whole crowd was trying to touch him, because power went out from him which cured all”* (Lk 6: 18-19). Luke continues: *“Then, raising his eyes to his disciples, he said: ‘Blessed are you poor ...’* (Lk 6:20). In Luke, the beatitudes are addressed primarily to the apostles and disciples **for the world**. The beatitudes – poverty, humility – are not simply ascetical virtues meant to perfect us – they are meant to forge bonds of communion and love to transform the world! Jesus challenges his disciples to share the saving, transforming power which they can visibly see him exercising among the people by configuring their lives according to the beatitudes of the Kingdom. But there is more!

Again, in Luke, specifically addressing the disciples, Jesus tells them a parable:

*“Can a blind man act as guide to a blind man? Will they not both fall into a ditch? A student is not above his teacher ... Why look at the speck in your brother’s eye when you miss the plank in your own”* (Lk 6: 39 – 41).

*“Can a blind man act as a guide to a blind man?”* Just as the preaching of the beatitudes takes new meaning by referring back to Jesus’ electric relationship with the crowds, so this passage takes meaning from the introduction of the Kingdom event: *“He went to the mountain to pray, spending the whole night in communion with God”* (Lk 6:39). Only a return to the mountain, to contemplation, can open the eyes of our hearts, allow our passion to be re-ignited, for Jesus and the transforming power of the beatitudes. Only contemplation of the face of God can transform the beatitudes from social theory to faith practice. We see this in Francis’ embrace of evangelical poverty. Standing before the Bishop of Assisi, contemplating the face of God, Francis strips himself not only of the clothing provided by Pietro di Bernardone, but the security his wealth promised, and entrusts his security to God alone. Contemplation of the face of God transforms the beatitudes from social theory into faith practice.

*“A student is not above his teacher; ...”* (Lk 6:40). It is important to ask: *“Who is our teacher?”*. Through whose eyes do we look upon the poor? Through whose eyes do we look upon the consumerism and greed of our world? The daily newspaper or nightly television news? A journal of sociology or even of theology? Or, do we listen to the Word of God in daily prayer?

*“A student is not above his teacher ...!”* If the daily newspaper or sociological journal or even a theological text is our only teacher, we are unable to lead our people beyond our teacher! The, the person of Jesus, the Word of God, purifies us and continually reveals to us our true identity, the identity of the poor and the true identity of our world.

*“Why look at the speck in your brother’s eye when you miss the plank in your own”* (Lk 6:41). We are painfully aware how the toleration of sexual misconduct on the part of the clergy has blighted the Church’s proclamation of the gospel. Our newspapers make us aware of that! However, do we realize how our newspapers and televisions immunize us to the violence, greed and dominating power which so oppress our world and whose roots exist in every human heart, including our own? Only a return with Jesus to the mountain, only the contemplation of the holiness and compassion of God can help us to recognize the dimensions of our immersion into the corporate sinfulness of our world and even corporate sinfulness of our Church which impedes us in extending the healing touch of Jesus in our world. Prayer and contemplation must transform us from ecclesiastical functionaries into apostles/disciples/ministers of the mysteries of God:

*“Prayer to God, as the breathing of love, has its origins from a movement of the Holy Spirit through which an interior person listens to the voice of God speaking to the heart. For (it is) God who has loved us first ... ”* (Const.OFMCap. 45:1)

For Francis, Clare and Bonaventure, contemplation is seeing with the eyes of the heart! Prayer and contemplation must constantly ignite and re-ignite in our hearts the passion expressed by St. Bonaventure as he describes the Journey of the Soul into God:

*“But if you wish to know how these things come about,  
Ask grace not instruction,  
Desire not understanding,  
The groaning of prayer not diligent reading,  
The Spouse not the teacher,  
God not man,  
Darkness not clarity;  
Not light but the fire  
That totally inflames and carries us into God ...  
This fire is God,  
And his furnace is in Jerusalem;  
And Christ enkindles it  
In the heat of his burning passion.”*

### **Joy of the Gospel**

In the **Joy of the Gospel**, Pope Francis has a number of statements which merit our reflection:

1. "The spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization." (EG, 78).
2. "Standing before him with open hearts, letting him look at us, we see that gaze of love which Nathaniel glimpsed on the day when Jesus said to him: 'I saw you under the fig tree' (Jn 1: 48). (EG, 264)
3. "A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him." (EG, 266)
4. "Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people." (EG, 268)

**Question:**

- In the animation of our fraternities and in promoting our mission, we often presume the personal commitment of each brother to Jesus Christ. How can we re-awaken in our brothers the passion for Christ which we see in Francis:

*"This is what I want, for this I yearn, this is what I desire to do with all my heart!"*

*"Let us now begin, brothers, because until now we have done nothing!"*

**FOR FRANCIS, THE EMBRACE OF JESUS LEADS DIRECTLY TO BROTHERHOOD**

*"After the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live after the pattern of the Holy Gospel."*  
(Test. 14)

Francis chose humility, minority, as the defining characteristic of his brotherhood. Bonaventure gives the theological foundation of this choice. Bonaventure tells us: the turning of the Father toward the Son in total self-giving love is the Father's humility. Therefore, in his *Praises of God*, when Francis addresses God, he does not use the adjective "humble", but the noun "humility". Humility is not a quality of God. Humility is the essence of God as love. Humility defines the "TO BE" of the Father – the very essence of the Father – eternally turned toward the Son in Self-Giving Love. The option for **relationship** defines the humility of God. God is communion of Father, Son and Spirit made one in total, self-giving love. We are accustomed to speak of "**one God in three persons**", it is more precise and correct to speak of **three persons who are one God**. When we speak of "one God in three persons", it is possible

to think of God as a static reality. When we speak of “three persons who are one God”, the unity of God is ecstatic and dynamic. Bonaventure situates the mystery of Church communion within the dynamism of this Mystery of Trinitarian Relationship. He speaks of the “**Eternal Word**” in the bosom of the Father – the “**Incarnate Word**” enfleshed in Jesus Christ – and the “**Inspired Word**” enfleshed in the communion of the Church. Just as there is only one “**Word**”, so there is one **communion**. There are not two sets of communion – one among Divine Persons and the other among human persons with the latter called to replicate or imitate the former. There is one mystery of communion which includes God and humanity as beloved partners in “perichoresis”, “circumincessio”, “the dance of life”. We are taken up into Trinitarian Relationship, Trinitarian communion. This understanding of the communion of the Church is echoed in Preface VIII for Sundays in Ordinary Times:

*“When your children were scattered afar by sin,  
Through the Blood of your Son and the power of the Spirit,  
You gathered them again to yourself,  
That a people, formed as one by the unity of the Trinity,  
Made the body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit,  
Might ... be manifest as the Church.”*

In this Trinitarian understanding of communion, our Order finds the dynamism and meaning of the witness of fraternal living. The Conventual Constitutions speak of fraternity as “**icon of the Trinity**” (OFMConv.62) and the Capuchin Constitutions speak of fraternity as “**a human space inhabited by the Trinity**” (OFMCap. 88.3):

*“The Church, born from the side of Christ as a sacrament of unity, is essentially a mystery of communion, whose richness and depth are reflected in fraternal living, a human space inhabited by the Trinity.”* (OFMCap. 83.3).

There are three characteristics of the early Franciscan fraternity which strongly impact our mission in the Church:

- The early Franciscan fraternity was based the personal relationship of each brother with Jesus Christ and, through Christ, with each of his brothers in fraternity. Fraternity is not the embrace of structure. Rather, it is the embrace of each of our brothers. It is profoundly relational.
- Franciscan fraternity is to be the **Inspired Word**. Franciscan fraternity is not simply a group of brothers called together **to serve** the Church. Francis formed his brotherhood **TO BE** Church. The fraternal gospel life, inspired by Francis, is a whirlpool drawing all who encounter it, all who witness and experience it, into a lived experience of Trinitarian Love: “**a human space inhabited by the Trinity**”.
- These two basic characteristics of the early Franciscan Order were strongly influenced by the fact that Francis chose an itinerant model of life. Itineracy in the Franciscan tradition is more than wandering! In an itinerant model, fraternal life takes new forms not only place to place, but also with each group of brothers. Our Discipleship Model has been institutionalized yet the itinerant origins of our charism continue to have

important implications today, and must continue to infuse our fraternal vision and our fraternal service. All communal forms of religious life are **functionally** relational. However, generally speaking, in the Acts Model of religious life, structure gives rise to, it determines, and it gives form and stability to fraternal relationships. In the Discipleship Model established by Francis, relationships give rise to structure and structure exists to sustain relationships: **Franciscan communion does not flow from structure, rather, structure flows from Franciscan communion.** This is very clearly expressed in the Conventual Constitutions when speaking about the Conventual Chapter: *“the privileged instrument of communion”* which must *“establish a suitable schedule for communal exercises which take into account the daily life according to the spirit of the fraternity and of each of the friars”* (OFMConv. 63). Fraternal relationships are the “glue” which holds all structures together: *“As brothers given to each other by the Lord ... we should accept one another gratefully”* (OFMCap., 89.1). Friars don’t fit the structures. Rather structures are molded to fit the friars, express their unity and release the creativity of each.

I wish to develop four consequences which touch our mission in the United States today:

- **We are an Order of brothers;**
- **Francis formed his brotherhood TO BE Church;**
- **We are an Order obedient to, but separate from, the hierarchical authority of the Church;**
- **The Holy Spirit is the General Minister of our Order.**

#### **1. We are an Order of brothers**

We are an Order of brothers! The brotherhood we share is profoundly relational. Whenever Francis refers to himself, he always refers to himself as “I, brother Francis”. Leo was an ordained minister, but he was “brother Leo”. And in both cases, it is “brother” with a small case “b”, not a capital “B”. Because the title is relational not occupational! Francis was enthralled by the fact that, in his Incarnation, Jesus became his brother. Francis became acutely aware that just as Jesus became Francis’ brother in the incarnation, Jesus also became brother to every man, woman and child and forged a fraternal relationship with all of creation. Francis’ relationship with Jesus, caused him to become brother to every man, woman, child and even every living creature on the earth. This is more than cute! It is revolutionary! This is fundamental to our charism. The three branches of the First Order have been united in recent times in petitioning the Church to recognize the unique nature of our brotherhood and to dispense our Order from the requirement that only clerics can assume the ministry of leadership in our Order. This is important for the unity of our brotherhood. It is also an important witness to the Church that a Franciscan cleric can be subject to a lay member of the Church without impeding but rather enhancing his priestly ministry.

However, there is another equally important ecclesial dimension! A Franciscan who identifies himself as brother as Francis identified himself as brother, will minister to his neighbour in an entirely different way. There can be no hint of domination in an authentic fraternal relationship! This is a strong witness and antidote to clericalism in our Order and in our Church. Pope Francis reminds us that priesthood has authority, however, “its key and axis is not power understood as domination, but the power to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist” (EG, 104). Franciscan fraternal relationships, lived joyfully, should become a force to redefine priestly relationships which are “totally ordered to the holiness of Christ’s members.” (EG 104 quoting JP II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 27). Aside from how we may be addressed by our people, a friar priest ... or a friar bishop ... who identifies himself as “brother” will exercise his ministry in a different manner.

### **Joy of the Gospel:**

1. *“Some people want a purely spiritual Christ, without flesh and without the cross ... True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others.”* (EG, 88)
2. *“God’s word teaches that our brothers and sisters are the prolongation of the incarnation for each of us.”* (EG, 179)

### **Question:**

- “A friar priest ... or a friar bishop ... who identifies himself as ‘brother’ will exercise his ministry in a different manner.” Do you see this as an antidote to clericalism in our Order and the Church? Can we provide concrete examples?

### **2. Francis formed his brotherhood TO BE Church**

Franciscan fraternity is not simply a group of brothers called together **to serve** the Church. Francis formed his brotherhood **TO BE** Church. Inspired by Francis, fraternal gospel life is a whirlpool drawing all who encounter it, all who witness it, into a lived experience of Trinitarian Love: **“a human space inhabited by the Trinity”**. We remember the incident in the life of Francis when he invited a young brother to accompany him to preach in Assisi. They walked through the town greeting all whom they met. When they returned to the Portiuncula, the young brother asked when they were going to preach. The response: “We already have!” Pope Francis reminds us, “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’.” (EG, 15). This assumes even greater importance in the American Church today. The credibility of Church teaching is severely conditioned by decisions to protect institutional structures at the price of care for the vulnerable.

The itinerant nature of the early brotherhood also influences this witness of fraternal life. Just as fraternal life took new forms place to place and with each new group of brothers, so their gospel witness also spoke to the particular challenges of each new group of people they met ... think of the Wolf of Gubbio. It was not a “one-size-fits-all-Christianity”, rather the witness and

proclamation of gospel life was applied to each person and each community they encountered. They brought an encounter with Jesus Christ and not an ecclesiastical structure.

### **Joy of the Gospel:**

1. *“The spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization.”* (EG 78)
2. *“Salvation ... is for everyone. God ... has chosen to call them together as a people and not as isolated individuals.”* (EG 113)
3. *“The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”* (EG 114)
4. *“It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’.”* (EG 15)
5. *“The human person is always situated in a culture ... Grace supposes culture, and God’s gift becomes flesh in the culture of those who receive it.”* (EG 115)

### **Question:**

- How can we call our local fraternities to avoid “one-size-fits-all-Christianity” and to foster an outreach of witness and service which creates space “*where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the gospel?*” (EG 3)
- 3. An Order Obedient to, but separate from, the Hierarchical Authority of the Church**

The early Franciscan brotherhood and its mission was carried out in communion with and in total obedience to the hierarchical authority of the Church. When Francis had only a dozen followers, he went to Rome to ask Pope Honorius to approve their way of gospel life and witness. However, the brotherhood never formed part of the hierarchical structure of the Church! Even when the Order became institutionalized, it remained obedient to the hierarchical structure of the Church but outside of it. The Friary and the Friary Chapel were integral to the faith life of the local communities, but they did not participate in hierarchical authority. This gave the brothers a unique relationship with the faithful among whom they were recognized as brothers of the people. I am certain that this was not unique to the Capuchin branch of the Order but was shared by our entire Franciscan family. This relationship with both the faithful and the hierarchy provided a privileged platform to announce the gospel of Christ.

Speaking about the Capuchin branch, and I presume it is true of other branches of the Franciscan family, this changed in the mid-1800’s when we became a missionary Order. We became immersed in the hierarchical authority of the Church, taking responsibility not only for parishes but for entire Vicariates! We appointed not only pastors, but bishops!

Does not the present crisis in leadership in our Church not summon us to repossess our tradition? Functioning outside but totally obedient to the hierarchical structures, could we not

immerse ourselves in fraternal relationships with our people and lead them to renewed trust in the authority structures of our Church? We could do so with no conflict of interest.

### **Joy of the Gospel:**

1. *“We speak more about law than about grace, more about the Church than about Christ, more about the Pope than about God’s word.” (EG 38)*

### **Question:**

- How can we consciously re-possess our tradition of obedience to, but separation from the hierarchical authority of the Church?

#### **4. The Holy Spirit is the General Minister of our Order**

St. Francis tells us that the Holy Spirit is the “General Minister of our Order.” In Trinitarian Relationship, the Holy Spirit is the bond of unity between Father and Son. Cantalamessa refers to the Holy Spirit as “The Divine Us”. It is not we who enter into relationship with the Holy Trinity, it is the Holy Spirit, the “General Minister”, who draws us into relationship, creating “a human space inhabited by the Trinity”. The Franciscan Order is a network of Provinces. Each Province is a network of local fraternities. Just as the unity of the Trinity is dynamic, happening here and now, so each fraternity must be the same living, dynamic reality. The unity of the Fraternity is not a structural unity, happening in the moment I become assigned to that fraternity and accustom myself to the rhythm of this particular group of brothers. Like Trinitarian Unity, Franciscan unity must be dynamic and ecstatic. Franciscan unity must generate an energy which embraces daily all the brothers each in his own uniqueness and giftedness. This gospel energy must burst forth to embrace the world.

This defines authority in our brotherhood. The primary purpose of a minister’s authority is not “to get the job done”! Nor is it simply “to make the right decisions”! Rather the Minister must draw the brothers into communion and activate the gifts of each brother for the service of the fraternity and our gospel mission to the world.

The Holy Spirit, “the General Minister of our Order” calls the local fraternity to be formed as the wise maidens of Matthew 25: 1-13. As missionary disciples, we seek to touch and respond to the deepest desires of each person and of each society in the world around us, for this reveals the presence of God. Joined in local chapter, the brothers, like the wise virgins of Matt. 25, are to constantly scan the horizons of their society and, especially, the people among whom we are planted, seeking signs of the emerging presence of the Lord, seeking to touch God in each living person.

### **Joy of the Gospel:**

1. *“All of us are asked ... to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the gospel.”* (EG, 20)
2. *“‘Mere administration’ can no longer be enough. Throughout the world let us be ‘permanently in a state of mission’.”* (EG, 25)
3. *“Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be a missionary.”* (EG 272)
4. *“Christ’s resurrection is not an even of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world.”* (EG 276)

### **Question:**

- How can we as Ministers move beyond “mere administration” to foster a brotherhood “permanently in a state of mission”?
- How can the Local Chapter or Conventual Chapter truly become “*the privileged instrument of communion*” (Const.OFMConv. 63): discerning and uniting the gifts of each of the brothers in mission; and discerning the signs of the presence of the Lord in the people we serve?

### **Conclusion**

I wish to close by returning to Bonaventure’s vision of Trinitarian Relationship. God is communion of Father, Son and Spirit made one in total self-giving love. The Love-Who-Is-God, is not self-contained: the Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Father, the Father and Son One-in-the Spirit, forming a self-contained spiral of Eternal Love! No! Trinitarian-Unity-in-Love is ecstatic and dynamic bursting outward and giving birth to creation and to history. In a similar manner, Franciscan fraternity, “Icon” of the Trinity, “a human space inhabited by the Trinity”, is not self-contained. It must burst forth into the world in compassionate love.

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