

“May They Grow Holy...”

Our Common Franciscan Values

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“Live a Christian and religious existence without losing oneself in disputes and chattering” Pope Francis encouraged the General Chapter of the Friars Minor in 2016, a message he had informally given to the General Ministers of all three jurisdictions of the Friars Minor whenever they met together. Five centuries earlier another pope, Leo X, employed a stronger method to promote unity in the fractured First Order of Saint Francis when on May 29, 1517, in his heavy-handed decree, *Ite Vos*. Intended as a mandate of union, it became one of division. In these closing days of 2017, as Christians are marking the division initiated by Martin Luther, Conventual, Capuchin, and Observant Friars Minor find themselves considering what they have entitled “A Path for Walking Together and Growing in Common Vocation and Franciscan Mission.”

Placing *Ite Vos* in its historical context may facilitate looking more objectively to the future; re-examining our common values is far more challenging. Should *re-affirming* of those values be accentuated? That could become platitudinous and anesthetic. Should the focus be more *realistic*? That might be very subjective and become judgmental? Should the approach be *probing*? That might lead to discussion of demographic or economic issues?

The review of Paula Friedriksen’s book *Paul: The Pagan’s Apostle* written by Sarah Ruden wrote for the October 6, 2017 edition of *Commonweal* provided this author an ideal lens to address the above questions. After describing the difficulties of placing Friedriksen’s study of Paul into its proper context, Ruden admitted

“I’m a poet and translator inclined to urge celebration of ... texts for their beauty and inspiration, and to prefer a light touch on whatever seems to invite historical over-parsing on the one hand or superstitious literalism on the other.”¹

Etymologically “translation” comes from the Latin *trans-latio*, the act of taking something from one place or time to another. It is, therefore, the fine art of preserving the character of an original text — sometimes an ancient one — and giving it new life in vibrant contemporary expression. In many ways, the translator walks a tightrope from which he can fall, either into what can become a moribund nostalgia encased in cognates or into a labyrinth of distracting synonyms prowling about to find meaning in contemporary idioms. Poetry, meanwhile, is life-giving

¹ Sarah Ruden in *Commonweal* “Paul: The Pagan’s Apostle” October 6, 2017.

with the power to inspire, to cultivate sensitivity to words or, as Robert Frost describes it, “poetry is a way of taking life by the throat.”

One cannot spend all those hours, days, months, and years translating and studying those early documents of our Franciscan tradition without celebrating their beauty and inspiration while, at the same time, trying to avoid the “historical over-parsing and superstitious literalism” of which Ruden writes. Working as a team on such an endeavor as *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* as J.A. Wayne Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv, William J. Short, O.F.M., and I, demanded sensitivity to our unique Conventual, Observant, and Capuchin traditions, perspectives, and ways of expression.² It also demanded of each one of us patience, understanding, appreciation of one another’s gifts, and, above all, humor.

From those early documents, however, two seemingly simple passages from Francis’s writings occurred to me as vehicles for discussing them in light of the divisions that confront us: vehicles that may be *re-affirming* of those values, *realistic* in recognizing new opportunities for overcoming those divisions, and also, in light of the call to be followers of Francis, *probing* of the integrity with which we today strive to live our Gospel life in our increasingly divided world.

The first passage is taken from Francis’s *Testament*, a text that has been divisive ever since the thirteenth-century promulgations of Gregory IX’s *Quo elongati* (1230) and Nicholas III’s *Exiit qui seminat* (1279).³ Both papal documents emerged at a time when divisions were growing between the *Zelanti* or Spirituals and the Conventuals or Community: one side embracing the idealism expressed in what Francis called “a remembrance, admonition, exhortation, and my testament;” the other side favoring the interests of the institution by accentuating the nuances between Gospel precept and counsel. The second passage is taken from the two versions of the *Letter to the Faithful* (1 EpF I 1:18; 2 EpD 59). It is a text in which Francis fuses together two phrases from the seventeenth chapter of John’s Gospel, the first from John 17:19, the second from John 17:11. I chose these two passages of Francis’s writings because I felt they captured the 1965 calls of *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* “to grow and flourish according to the spirit of the founder.” Two passages from two writings of the saint whose heritage we claim: one historically divisive, the other challengingly ecumenical.

² *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, Volumes I “The Saint”, II “The Founder”, and III “The Prophet” Edited by Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999, 2000, 2001). All references to Franciscan Sources will be taken from this resource unless otherwise noted and referenced in the footnotes as FA:ED I, II, or III.

³ See Related Documents, Gregory IX, *Quo elongati* in FA:ED I, 570-575; and, Nicolas III, *Exiit qui seminat* in FA:ED III, 737-764.

The Testament 14

The first thirteen verses of Francis's *Testament* consist of a series of four simple, autobiographical statements: "The Lord gave me...", "The Lord led me...", and twice more, "The Lord gave me..." Francis articulates in a very personal way the fundamental values which guided the first generation of brothers who yearned to follow the Gospel life in a radical way: the embrace of a life of penance that began by being led and challenged by lepers, of a life of simple faith in churches and, again, in priests. Those initial four instances culminate in this statement, the *Testament 14*: "And when the Lord gave me some brothers, no one used to show me what to do; but the 'Most High' himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the holy Gospel." In that one statement Francis articulated his understanding of what we have most in common: *a brotherhood* and *a life patterned on the Gospel*. There is a very inter-personal relationship: the "Most High Lord" Who gives, leads, and reveals and "I" of Francis. The extremely individual character in this passage is curious: "...the Lord gave *me* brothers... no one was showing *me* what *I* should do, ...the 'Most High' revealed to *me* that *I* should live according to the pattern of the holy Gospel." What was leaving us as his document, his "last will"? The answer to that question seems unanswerable to this day and may only be answered by his contrasting uses of "I wish" and "they must." (Test 6, 8, 11, 12, 20, 27, 28, 290. Francis was, it seems, a man who believed in Paul's claim that "...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Cor 3:17).

Our modern Franciscan interpretations of the *Testament* were undoubtedly influenced by the work of Kajetan Esser, O.F.M., the first of his many studies of the writings of Saint Francis which culminated in his critical edition of them. In the post-World War II Franciscan world it was translated shortly thereafter into all the major languages of the western world, with one exception, English, when it finally saw the light of day in 1982.⁴ In a series of conferences he later delivered in Rome, Esser spoke of these passages as simply underscoring the saint's desire for his brothers to cultivate gratitude for the unique role of the Lord in initiating their way of life of poverty and simplicity.⁵ In other words, Esser saw the *Testament's* autobiographical section (Test 1-23) in light of that dramatic confrontation at the Chapter of Mats described in the *Assisi Compilation 18* when the brothers urged him to adopt the rules of Augustine, Benedict, or Bernard.⁶ By the time Esser's work appeared in an English translation, however,

⁴ Kajetan Esser, *The Testament of Saint Francis: A Commentary*. Translated by Madge Karechi. Foreword by Serge Wroblewski. (Pulaski, WI: Franciscan Publishers, 1982), 5.

⁵ Kajetan Esser, *Rule and Testament of St. Francis: Conferences to the Modern Followers of Francis*. (Chicago : Franciscan Herald Press, 1977).

⁶ Anonymous, *Assisi Compilation 18*: "When blessed Francis was at the general chapter called the Chapter of Mats, held at Saint Mary of the Portiuncula, there were five thousand brothers present. Many wise and learned brothers told the Lord Cardinal, who later became Pope Gregory, who was present at the chapter, that he should persuade blessed Francis to follow the advice of

it became simply another work of commentary that was swept away in the wave of books and articles of the “Franciscan *ressourcement*” which introduced English-speaking Franciscans of all three jurisdictions to the primary sources of their tradition.

While working on a series of spiritual conferences on the *Rule* and *Testament* delivered in Rome throughout 1974, Esser wrote a provocative article for the Capuchins, “The *Testament* of Saint Francis in Capuchin Legislation.”⁷ The first third of that article traced the acceptance and rejection of the *Testament* amid the tensions and struggles of the two protagonists involved in *Ite Vos*, the tensions and struggles that began with *Quo elongati* (1230). Throughout the remainder of the article Esser made it a point to remind his Capuchin confreres that the secret of their success could be found in the frequent citations of Francis’s writings, especially the *Testament*, in the first Capuchin Constitutions of 1536, less than twenty years after *Ite Vos*.

Shortly after Esser’s death in 1978, a number of predominantly lay historians began looking at the *Testament* from different, more objective perspectives attempting, as best they could, to avoid prejudiced interpretations. Many of them wrote significantly not only of its unique place among Francis’s writings, but also its implications for Christian — not simply Franciscan — spirituality. In order to do so, they attempted to sidestep the polemics of poverty, itineracy, authority, and the obligations of the evangelical counsels. Instead they focused more sharply on a passage that tends to overlook “to live according to the pattern of the Gospel.”

Among them was the respected Italian historian, Giovanni Miccoli. His 1983 article, “Francis of Assisi’s Christian Proposal” offered the insights of a lay man who marveled at Francis’s genius and at the reasons for his success and that of the first generation of his followers.⁸ Surprisingly Miccoli devoted only one brief paragraph to Francis’s description of the way of life lived by “those who came to receive life” (Test 15-23). Instead his research led him to what he saw as “a summary of Francis’s religious experience” and suggested that the first four autobiographical references to the Lord’s actions in his life (Test 1, 2, 4, 6) set the stage for the fifth (Test 14). They were, he suggested, “like different stages or particular moments in the development of something which would later become a single unified religious proposal.”

those same wise brothers and allow himself to be guided by them for the time being. They cited the *Rule* of blessed Benedict, of blessed Augustine, and of blessed Bernard, which teach how to live in such order in such a way.” For a commentary, see Regis J. Armstrong, “*Novellus Pazzus in Mundo: The Call to Foolishness*,” *Collectanea Franciscana* 79(2009): 469-486.

⁷ Kajetan Esser, “Das Testament des hl. Franziskus in der Gesetsbbung des Kapuzinerdens” in *Collectanea Franciscana* 44 (1974): 45-69; translated by Ignatius McCormick as “The Testament of St. Francis in Capuchin Literature” in *Greyfriars Review* 4(1990): 117-141.

⁸ Giovanni Miccoli, “La Proposta Cristiana di Francesco d’Assisi” in *Studi Medievali* 24 (1983): 17-76; translated by Edward Hagman as “Francis of Assisi’s Christian Proposal” in *Greyfriars Review* 3(1989): 127-172.

Meanwhile, a young Italian scholar, Roberto Paciocco, wrote an article entitled “Choice of Life vs. Reputation for Holiness. From *Brother* Francis to *Saint* Francis” which built upon the insights of Miccoli, as well as those of Théophile Desbonnet, Grado Giovanni Merlo, Attilio Bartoli Angeli, and others.⁹ Paciocco based his interpretation of “...I should live according to the pattern of the holy Gospel” on the dying Francis’s declaration to his brothers: “I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours!” (2C 214; LM XIV 3). In this light Paciocco astutely pointed out “how difficult it is to translate ‘live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel’ into institutional or juridical terms.” The focus of these lay historians, therefore, tended to discuss more personal or developmental approaches and not by the observance of the Gospel counsels as seen in *Quo elongati* and *Exiit qui seminat*, but on Francis’s Gospel intuitions.

In 1990, seven years later, Miccoli re-visited his interpretation in a presentation he entitled “A Christian Experience between Gospel and Institution.”¹⁰ He acknowledged the exegetical studies on Francis’s writing in which attempts had been made to trace the development of a way of life based on the Gospel texts and allusions in those writings. Then he stated provocatively: “Nevertheless, we do not think that this is the best way to proceed, nor do we think that it is sufficient to collect the Scriptural references from which Francis learned to understand the Gospel life.” As he had done in his earlier article, Miccoli took a much broader and dynamic view and reflected again on what he perceived as the two daily sources that continually inspired and shaped Francis’s life: the unfolding mystery of the Incarnation and the self-implicating revelation of God’s daily embrace of lesser-ness in the liturgy of the Eucharist.¹¹

In this light, it is worthwhile paying attention to Miccoli’s observation about the exegesis of Francis’s writings at the expense of struggling with the hermeneutics for understanding them. Raymond Brown made an insightful distinction between exegesis and hermeneutics as that between what the texts once “meant” and what they “mean” to-day.¹² In his *Many Roads Lead Eastward: Overtures to Catholic Biblical Theology*, Secular Franciscan and Old Testament professor, Robert D. Miller II, reflected upon Brown’s observation and noted: “...this is not as accurate

⁹ Roberto Paciocco, “Una coscienza tra scelta di vita e fama di santità. Francesco d’Assisi frater e sanctus” *Hagiographica* I (1994): 207-226; translated by Edward Hagman as “Choice of Life vs. Reputation for Holiness. From *Brother* Francis to *Saint* Francis” in *Greyfriars Review* 10:1(1996): 27-45).

¹⁰ Giovanni Miccoli, “Un’esperienza Cristiana tra Vangelo e istituzione,” in *Acts of the XVIII International Congress of Franciscan Studies, Assisi, October 18-20, 1990*. Translated by Paul Barrett as “A Christian Experience between Gospel and Institution” in *Greyfriars Review* 11 2(1997): 113-141.

¹¹ Miccoli, “Francis of Assisi’s Christian Proposal”, p. 142.

¹² Raymond Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 23-44. My gratitude to Robert D. Miller II for pointing this out to me.

as seeing it as a ‘gap’ between what was once achieved, intended, or ‘shown,’ and what might be achieved, intended, or ‘shown’ today.”¹³

Curiously, few modern scholars of the *Testament* have reflected in their discussion on this phrase: “the ‘Most High’ himself revealed to me...” In his 1947 analysis, Esser had touched on it in the general sense of God’s communications to Francis. Our post-conciliar theology of revelation, however, raises a question: did Francis understand this to be a call to be attentive to the content or objective meaning of God’s communication? If so, it also raises a challenge: what does it mean to be receptive today to the Lord’s revelation? *Revelavit* [He revealed], literally “He removed a veil,” is a word rarely used by Francis — in fact, only three times, once in the *Office of the Passion’s* direct quotation of Psalm 97:2 — “The Lord has made known His salvation; in the sight of the nations He has revealed His justice” — and twice in this paragraph of the *Testament*.¹⁴ Only in the context of “the Lord’s *gift* of brothers,” however, do the implications of “the ‘Most High’ himself *revealed /removed the veil* for me” become clearer. Three mysteries are implied in this unveiling: the “Most High,” the brother, and the ways of dealing with both. For example, the mystery behind did the Lord give *this* brother to me? Or, the mystery behind what is God trying to teach me through this brother’s strengths or weaknesses? Or, the mystery behind how I might discover the Gospel pattern God wants me to follow right now? While the word appears infrequently in Francis’s writings, its presence in this consideration of brotherhood and the pattern of Gospel life suggests we might profit from reflecting on the dynamic of revelation in our daily life.

Anyone familiar with the early academic career of Joseph Ratzinger will recall his struggle defending Bonaventure’s theology of revelation in his habilitation. In what was published – minus its first controversial chapter – as *The Theology of History of Saint Bonaventure*, the young academic pointed out that, at the time of his doctoral defense, Bonaventure’s concept of revelation was not immediately comparable with similar concepts in modern theology.¹⁵ Ratzinger went on to describe a more dynamic concept of revelation as “the mystery hidden in Scripture and, therefore, ...effecting a pneumatic understanding of Scripture.” From that perspective, he considered revelation as referring “to that imageless unveiling of the divine reality in the mystical ascent.”¹⁶ The importance of Ratzinger’s

¹³ Robert D. Miller II, *Many Roads Lead Eastward* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 30ff. While building upon Brown’s distinction, Miller was also referring to the work of Stephen E. Fowl and L. Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), and David H. Kelsey, “Theological Use of Scripture in Process Hermeneutics” in *Process Studies*, 13 (1983): 181-188.

¹⁴ Francis of Assisi, *Office of the Passion*, Matins of Easter Sunday, Psalm [IX]: 3 (Ps 98:2); *Earlier Exhortation* I:18; *Later Admonition and Exhortation* 59.

¹⁵ Ratzinger, *The Theology of History in St. Bonaventure*. Translated by Zachary Hayes. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), 59.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

early academic struggle became evident in the first chapter of the Second Vatican Council's *Dei Verbum*, the composition of which, as we know, he played a significant role. It became even more significant in *Verbum Domini*, the post-synodal exhortation "On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," in which as Pope Benedict he wrote of it seventy-four times.

Nowadays it is difficult to reflect on the theology of revelation without consulting René Latourelle's *Theology of Revelation* or two works of Latourelle's student, Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology* and *Models of Revelation*.¹⁷ In his consideration of hermeneutical models, Miller reviewed Dulles's five models of revelation and re-labeled them through five English words, each beginning with "E": Encounter, Event, Experience, Expression, and Expectation.¹⁸ Miller's focus is helpful for re-examining the implication of what the most High revealed to Francis in the context of his brothers, i.e., "the pattern of the holy Gospel." Francis "encountered" the word (Dulles's "doctrinal model" of revelation) in the "event" which took place in either the church of San Nicolo or that of the Portiuncula (Dulles's "historical model"). This moment of the discovery of God's word in this place was an unforgettable "experience" of divine communication (Dulles's "inner experiential model"), one that made an impact, an "expression" to others as in "the Lord revealed to me" (Dulles's "dialectical model"), and led to an "expectation", the words on his death-bed, "may He do the same for you" (Dulles's fifth "new awareness model").

There is wisdom in Miccoli's singling out Francis's daily encounter with the Incarnation and the Eucharist. From the Incarnation, he discovered how the Word-made-Flesh lived among his brothers and sisters; from the Eucharist, he experienced anew, each day how the Word chooses to come among us. An exegesis of Francis's writings may best offer us a hermeneutical tripod of prayer, penance, and poverty upon which to rest the lens of our focus on the pattern of the holy Gospel in the context of daily life with our brothers. From this perspective, what may divide our common heritage most, then, is not our exegesis of Francis's writings about that Gospel life, but the hermeneutics through which we can discover what that means today.¹⁹

In different settings, however, both Esser and Miccoli pointed to the *Admonitions* for an understanding of the implications of the pattern of the Gospel which must be lived, but from different perspectives: Esser for the more spiritual, Miccoli for the more historical. What both men neglected, however, was to accentuate the life-giving

¹⁷ René Latourelle, *Theology of Revelation* (New York, NY: Alba House, 1966). Avery Dulles, *Revelation Theology: A History* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969). Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1985).

¹⁸ Robert D. Miller II, *Many Roads Lead Eastward* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016), 32ff.

¹⁹ Without realizing it I may have attempted to do this in the articles I wrote "If My Words Remain in You: Foundations of the Evangelical Life" and "Francis of Assisi and the Prism of Theology." While not using Brown's terminology I described Francis as leaving us a unique tripod of penance, prayer, and poverty on which the Franciscan hermeneutic rests.

activity of the Spirit who is clearly present in the *First Admonition* as the Spirit who enables us to have an access to and a vision of the “inaccessible God” (Adm I 5); and, in the *Seventh Admonition* the “Spirit of Sacred Scripture” who gives us life and teaches us how to live it. While so much of our common Franciscan history has been marred by the polemics of the contents of the gospel pattern, i.e., poverty, authority, expressions of brotherhood, etc., might it not be worthwhile for us to reflect more on the spiritual dynamic — which we actually share in common — as we, like Francis, struggle to unveil the mysteries of our lives.²⁰ The *Rule’s* single-minded clarion call in this dysfunctional world needs to be heard more than ever: “...let them pay attention to what they must desire above all else: to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity.” (LR X 8).

The Earlier Letter to the Faithful I 18

This leads me to the second passage from Francis’s writings and a further reflection of our common values. In light of the strident tones of *Ite Vos*, the curious welding of two Johannine phrases in Francis’s writings is striking: “*may they grow holy in being one* (Jn 17:19) *as we are one* (Jn 17:11).” The originality in bringing these two phrases together seems a natural segue to our discussion of life “according to the pattern of the holy Gospel. Was this scribal error, one corrected in the twenty-second chapter of the *Earlier Rule*? Or was it a fortuitous slip of his memory? Or was it a Spirit-filled insight into his Gospel intuitions and an expression of his fundamental Gospel wish for his followers?

Much has been written of Francis’s penchant for the Gospel of John and, in particular, its seventeenth chapter. The twenty-second chapter of the *Earlier Rule* and both *Exhortations to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*, the *Earlier* and *Later*, contain lengthy citations from it. It may be argued, as some have done, that Francis appropriates the words of Jesus so that, in doing so, he brings his own prayer to life according to “the pattern of the holy Gospel.” In fact, that Gospel pattern is clearly present as a dynamic principle for all his followers. In all three writings, *three patterns of relationships* are discernible: the Father and the Son, the Son and those whom the Father has given him, and those given to the Son and those who, through them, have come to believe. *The call to grow in holiness* is also discernible as it permeates all three patterns of these relationships beginning with the Father who is addressed as “holy,” the Son who speaks of his own call to be holy, that of those given to Him, and that of those through whom

²⁰ A most helpful article in this regard is that of Piet Fransen, “Divine Revelation: Source of Man’s Faith,” in *Faith: Its Name and Meaning*. Papers of the Maynooth Union Summer School. Edited by Paul Surlis (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Limited, 1970), 18-52.

others come to believe. Discernible in the pattern of each set of relationships is the call “*to be one as we are one*,” a call founded on the revelation of the Triune God.

The *Earlier Exhortation’s* version of the joining together of these Gospel passages offers the clearest expression of this “pattern of the holy Gospel.” “May grow holy by being one as we are one” is the most succinct and straightforward version and, it may be argued, forms the foundation for the other citations. After reminding his readers of the wonder of having such a brother who is also such a son, Francis summarizes his understanding of his Gospel life. The generosity of the Father to the Son is immediately obvious in the gifts of followers and of words, as is the generosity of the Son to his followers in gifting his own followers with the words He has received. Then this prayer: “*I do not pray only for them, but for those who through their words will believe in me (Jn 17:20), so that may they grow holy in being one (Jn 17:19) as we are one (Jn 17:11).*” While these passages are expressed in terms of the Father and the Son, the Spirit’s presence remains inconspicuous unless attention is given to the repeated mention of word and words and until John’s theology of the word as “spirit and life” is interpreted as its underpinning: the words the Father gives to Son, Jesus then give to those who have been given to Him, and they in turn give them to those to whom they are sent.²¹ Why? “*That they may grow holy in being one as we are one.*”

A Final, Personal Thought

Over the years I have found helpful Bernard of Clairvaux’s encouragement of his monks to absorb the meaning an ancient sacred text, the *Song of Songs*, by reading “the book of one’s own experience.”²² Working on *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, “the book of experience” began teaching this student of Franciscan life more about our common Franciscan values than the text themselves. The frequent meetings Wayne Hellmann, Bill Short, and I had would take us from one jurisdiction to another: from Berkeley, CA, to Saint Louis, MO, to Interlaken, NY, that is, from the friary of the Friars Minor of the Saint Barbara Province in Berkeley, to the that of the Conventuals of Our Lady of Consolation Province in Saint Louis, and to that of the Capuchins of the Province of Saint Mary in Interlaken, NY. In addition to taking advantage of room and board, we prayed with our brothers, entered freely into

²¹ Enter the role of preachers and theologians who, in the words of the *Testament*, “minister the most holy divine words, [that are] spirit and life.”

²² Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* III 1. One might easily see paying attention to one’s experiences as a continuing theme in Bernard’s *Sermons on the Song of Songs*: I 9, 11; III 1; XVI 9; XX 9; XXVIII 9; XXXI 5; XXXIII 11; XLIX 7; LXXXIII 6; LXXXIV 7.

their banter, and absorbed the wisdom which they off-handedly and freely imparted to us. Throughout those years we developed lasting friendships rooted in our common life. After knocking over a Christmas tree meticulously decorated by a Capuchin in a residence of the Friars Minor, setting off fire alarms and freezing the internet connection in a Conventual Provincialate: all this while repeatedly eating and drinking out of house and home all three of our jurisdictions, we marveled that we continued to be welcomed back and always with enthusiasm for and interest in our work. As a result, what the texts were teaching us about our common Franciscan values was being verified or fleshed out by our experiences. If, as Pope Francis maintains, “The charism is not a bottle of distilled water and needs to be lived energetically as well as reinterpreted culturally...”, we must continue to ask ourselves how are we preparing our younger brother to stand on the shoulders of the giants from whom we learned how to drink living water and to look forward by looking backward. Our common Franciscan values are best expressed in our awareness of the spirit of the founder, as the spirit of *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* encouraged us. Our common Franciscan values? I would like to suggest that the book of experience has taught the three of us that this translation enterprise — more than the three volumes themselves — may prove that we do indeed have much in common. May that book of experience offer encouragement and inspiration for those young brothers who come after us.