

Article

Can the Franciscan Legacy Be Decolonized or Decolonialized?

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Abstract: Over the centuries, the dynamic and fluid charism labeled “Franciscanism” has evolved, changed and morphed well beyond the vision of St. Francis and St. Clare. There is ample evidence to suggest that, after Vatican II and its mandate for religious communities to renew themselves (*Perfectae caritatis*, nn. 2 et passim), Franciscans of various stripes have done just that. On the other hand, the majority of First Order friars in the world are yet clerics, often minister in diocesan settings (e.g., parishes), and frequently self-identify more as “Fr” than “Br”. Recent developments in postcolonial and decolonial theory provide valuable lenses for discerning to what extent First Order Franciscans have actually recovered the founding charisms. While distinguished by genealogy, chronology and priorities—some argue that decolonization is about reasserting control of land and resources, while decolonialization is concerned with the epistemic control that continues long after foreign administrations have receded—these two frames are yet intimately linked. Together, they provide welcomed tools for discerning to what extent monasticized, clericalized and “diocesanized” stands of ministry, administration and thinking persist among First Order friars in the 21st century. This engagement with unexpected dialogue partners from critical theories, rather than with the more comfortable and traditional arenas of history and spirituality, promises fresh and maybe even unsettling insights about our enacted spirituality.

Keywords: Franciscanism; Capuchin; charism; coloniality; colonization; decolonization; decoloniality; fraternity; legacy; mission

1. Introduction

Assessing a legacy as broad as Franciscanism is a daunting endeavor. That task becomes even more intimidating when one begins to contend with the implicit future trajectory and missiological implications embedded in the concept of “legacy”. Most dictionaries tend to define legacy as some gift, such as property or money that is handed on from one generation to the next as a bequest, endowment or inheritance. Financial advisors of every stripe will recommend that such a legacy needs to be protected, wisely managed, and judiciously invested so that its benefits will endure insuring a secure future. Few such advisors would ever encourage wagering such a gift on unstable stocks, untested companies, or—heaven forbid—at the roulette tables of Monte Carlo or Las Vegas.

Ironically, however, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) begins its commentary on the term “legacy” around the idea of delegate or legate, rooted in the etymology of the word.¹ Thus, it first defines legacy as “The function or office of a delegate or deputy”. It then defines the word in terms of being a papal legate, and explains legacy as a legateship or “to send as a legate”. A second cluster of definitions, deemed obsolete, concern “the message or business committed to a delegate or depute”.

¹ <https://www-oed-com.ctu.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/107006?rskey=8hCj6Y&result=1#eid> (accessed on 23 October 2019).

Then, also flagged as “obsolete”, OED defines legacy as “a body of people sent on a mission, or as a deputation, to a sovereign, etc.” Only then does this venerable resource turn to the more commonly understood definition of legacy as “the action or an act of bequeathing”. Subsequent definitions revolve around long-established businesses or companies whose activities or practices have been discontinued or superseded, and similarly computing hardware or software that “has been superseded but remains in use”. The final entry explains legacy as “designating something left over from a previous era but still in active existence”.

How we assess our Franciscan legacy depends on which definition of the term we highlight. While there are valid forms of such assessment around the idea of a bequest or something left over from a previous era but still in active existence, I lean toward the legate, deputy, missionary frames that place as much emphasis on the future than on the past. I am particularly influenced here by a former student who wrote her recent doctoral work focusing on Roman Catholic women’s religious communities in the United States, most of which are in steep decline. In her empirical study of apostolic women religious in the U.S., Dr. Brown documented how such communities—some teetering on the edge of ecclesial extinction—were actively engaged in creating fresh legacies for the future and not simply enshrining memories from their past (Brown 2019).

In service of not only maintaining the Franciscan legacy at hand, but also interested in creating a legacy authentically Franciscan yet genuinely contemporary, I propose considering the legacy we call the “Franciscan” charism through two related yet distinctive lenses employed to chart liberation movements around the globe in the 20th and 21st centuries: decolonization and decoloniality.

To that end, I will first offer brief definitions of decolonization and decoloniality, attempting to offer an accessible distinction between the two as especially espoused by contemporary South American theorists and theologians. Next, I will sketch how contemporary Franciscan scholarship and practice could be understood as a decolonizing of the charism through a few select examples. Finally, I will propose that while we have made serious strides in decolonizing the legacy, we have made less progress in the decolonializing of the legacy, which provides some possible trajectories for developing this legacy in the future.

I offer these reflections as a U.S. born senior citizen, Capuchin cleric, and academic whose research specializations do not allow me to self-characterize as a scholar of Franciscanism, but rather considers himself a practical theologian.

2. Definitions

Moments and movements are notoriously difficult to define. Decoloniality, which could alternately be considered both a moment and a movement,² is no exception to this definitional difficulty. One step in the definition of coloniality is distinguishing it from colonialism. Walter D. Mignolo distinguishes decolonial thinking from post-colonial theory genealogically: the latter located in French post-structuralism, and the former in “the dense history of planetary decolonial thinking”.³ Britta Saal elucidates:

While postcolonial critique undertakes an extension of Foucault, Gramsci, Derrida, and Lacan, while it realizes the problem of Orientalism (Said) and finally departs in its reflections from the postcolonial situation in India, decolonial critique has its roots in Latin America. It is based on approaches by critics of Eurocentrism like Jose Carlos Manategui, on dependency theory and on liberation philosophy.⁴

Ramón Grosfoguel distinguishes postcolonial studies from a coloniality of power approach, by asserting that the former conceptualizes the capitalist world-system “as being constituted primarily

² Thinandavha Masha (2018) considers it an “epistemological and political movement”.

³ (Mignolo 2011, p. 45); also see (Mignolo 2018), especially p. 365.

⁴ (Saal 2013, p. 60).

by culture”.⁵ For the latter, however, both culture and economy are equally important. Grosfoguel further distinguishes between coloniality and colonialism around the presence or absence of a colonial administration. Colonialism from Grosfoguel’s perspective refers to situations “enforced by the presence of a colonial administration”. Coloniality, on the other hand, continues “in the present period in which colonial administrations have almost been eradicated from the capitalist world-system”.⁶ For him, coloniality concerns both economic exploitation as well as the production of “subjectivities and knowledge”.⁷ His antidote to the latter, and a key emphasis in his writings, is the development of what he calls “border epistemologies”.⁸ Thus, while the economic dimensions are important for him, Grosfoguel, like so many South American theorists, also emphasizes the epistemic nature of decoloniality. As Mignolo (2018, p. 271) synthesizes: “Whoever controls and manages meaning (knowledge) controls and manages money (economic coloniality or capitalism in liberal and Marxist vocabulary)”.

Analogous to Grosfoguel’s emphasis on colonialism as largely defined by explicit political control of people or land or resources by some “foreign” administration is the argument by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang that decolonization is not a metaphor. They pointedly reject what they call “colonial equivocation” or “the vague equating of colonialisms that erase the sweeping scope of land as the basis of wealth, power, law in settler nation-states”.⁹ In what could seem as a veiled critique of some aspects of coloniality, they challenge the work of Frantz Fanon and those who follow him in believing that “decolonizing the mind is the first step . . . toward overthrowing colonial regimes”.¹⁰ Their concern about the cultivation of critical consciousness is that it actually could be a deceptive strategy they label a “settler move to innocence”, which allows “conscientization to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land”.¹¹ While they appreciate the contribution of critical consciousness, they are also concerned that “frontloading critical consciousness building can waylay decolonization”.¹² They conclude, “Until stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism”.¹³

This brief definitional survey allows us to agree with Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011) that the “decolonial turn does not refer to a single theoretical school, but rather points to a family of diverse positions that share a view of coloniality as a fundamental problem in the modern (as well as postmodern and information) age, and of decolonization or decoloniality as a necessary task that remains unfinished”.

A terminological note: while decoloniality and decolonization are distinctive, their operations are often described by employing the same verb, i.e., “to decolonize”. Since this can be confusing, I will employ the verb “to decolonialize” as distinguished from “to decolonize”. Hopefully this neologism will help provide some clarity in what follows.

3. Decolonization

If decolonization is at a foundational level understood as “getting the land back”, one could argue that there are distinctive ways that Franciscans have required the terrain of our shared life, especially since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). I highlight three of these.

⁵ (Grosfoguel 2006); translated online as “Decolonizing Political Economy and Postcolonial Studies: Transmodernity, border thinking, and global coloniality”, online at <https://www.eurozine.com/transmodernity-border-thinking-and-global-coloniality/>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.; also see (Grosfoguel 2005).

⁹ (Tuck and Yang 2012, p. 18).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

First is the recovery among men's communities of the primacy of fraternity as the defining dynamic of our lives, rather than sacramental priesthood. As St. Francis himself notes in his Testament, it was only *after* the Lord gave him brothers that God revealed to him that he should live a gospel life.¹⁴ One of the more intriguing developments to come out of the 1994 special Synod on Consecrated Life was the definition of a new genre of religious life, designated as "mixed communities". In his apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Pope John Paul II (d. 2005) defined mixed communities as those institutes "envisioned as a brotherhood in which all members, priests and those who were not priests, were considered equal among themselves".¹⁵

When communities, like my own Capuchin-Franciscan Order, addressed these two dynamics, it became clear that brotherhood and fraternity, rather than ordination, are the "specific kernel of the gospel form of life revealed by the Most High to Francis" ([Report of the Working Group on the Franciscan Identity of Our Order 2002](#)). Capuchins have declined to introduce the language of "clerical institute" into our constitutions, appealing this matter directly to Pope John Paul II in 1987. The Pope's message to the Minister General of the Capuchins in 1996, in which he stressed the link between our identity as brothers and the nature of "mixed institutes",¹⁶ seems to affirm the non-clerical nature of the Order. Thus, our constitutions read: "By reason of the same vocation, brothers are equal. Therefore, according to the Rule, the Testament and the earliest custom of the Capuchins, all of us are called brothers without distinction" (no. 90).¹⁷ According to Jude Winkler OFM Conv., assistant general for the Conventual friars, the ministers of the first orders are currently seeking a papal *grazia* from Pope Francis (b. 1938) to allow Mendicants to act as mixed communities.¹⁸

One structural change highly symbolic of this fraternal reappropriation in my own province has been the elimination of separate novitiates and even formation programs.¹⁹ During my own entry into the community in 1966, there were not only separate novitiates for friars, depending upon whether or not they were slotted in an ordination track, but we notably also had different titles: "frater" for the friars destined for priesthood, and "brother" for the rest. The deep clericalization and subsequently hierarchicalization that marked that era even generated a segregated typography in our friars. In our house of formation in Crown Point Indiana, touted in the 1960s as the largest Capuchin community in the world, there were five separate recreation rooms: one for simply professed fraters, another for simply professed brothers, a third for solemnly professed fraters, a fourth for solemnly professed brothers, and finally the priest's recreation room—symbolically the only one with a liquor cabinet. In this environment, seniority was also clericalized. We did everything by seniority, including seating plans in chapel, the dining room, and even in the distribution in rooms. When I entered the novitiate as the *bambino*, the youngest in the novitiate and thus in the province, I was informed that I had more seniority than the most senior lay friar in the community.

These practices embodied a deep-seated belief that priesthood was prized over the lay state, and that if a friar had the ability, priesthood was presumed—akin to the directive of the Council of Vienne in 1311 that presumed that every monk should be ordained.²⁰ I remember one "scrutiny" for final vows in 1972 in which an ordination candidate was publicly chastised for announcing that Capuchin life was more important for him than his impending priestly ordination.

¹⁴ Testament 14; see ([Armstrong et al. 1999–2001](#)).

¹⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, n. 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 339–42.

¹⁷ See also the Seventh Plenary Council of the Order ([Capuchin Order 2004](#)).

¹⁸ A *grazia* is a favor given to the communities, and it is valid as long as it is not revoked. See Jude Winkler, *Collaboration among Franciscans Today*. In ([Foley 2019](#), p. 60).

¹⁹ Thus, our Capuchin Constitutions note: Chapter 24: "To live together as lesser brothers is a primary part of our Franciscan vocation. Therefore, living as brothers is always and everywhere a basic requirement of the formation process". (24:7)

²⁰ "In order to promote divine worship, we decree that every monk, at the command of his abbot, should have himself raised to all the sacred orders, unless there is some lawful excuse". Council of Vienne, no. 14 at <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum15.htm>.

This turn toward fraternity, embedded in the Capuchin Constitutions, is dramatically symbolized in the legendary tale of an African American lay friar from my province, elected to the provincial council in 1970. He was the first lay friar to be elected in the Capuchin Order since 1603 and the first African American to serve in provincial leadership in the United States—something unheard of at the time. Br. Booker Ashe was appointed the representative of the North American Capuchin Conference for the 1973 second Plenary Council of the Order on “Our Life and Practice of Prayer”, held in Taizé, France. The first morning of that convening, of course, the friars celebrated Eucharist and all ordained friars concelebrated. That left one lone lay, Black friar as the congregation. It is not surprising that one of the ways my own province has sought to ritualize the mixed nature of the community is to eliminate concelebration from all provincial gatherings, except for those for presbyteral ordination in which the number of the concelebrants is restricted.

4. Missionary Nature of Our Ministry

Related to this turn to fraternity as central to our charism and the ensuing declericalization that accompanies that move is the decolonizing turn through a recovery of mission as central to Franciscan’s self-definition. While Francis knew the monastic life and evidently prayed with the Benedictines on Mt. Subasio, the vision he forged with Clare was decidedly non-monastic, itinerant, and outward focused. As Capuchin friars in Plenary Council asserted, “Fundamentally, every Franciscan vocation is missionary. The Franciscan life-plan according to the Gospel implies, at its root, a natural apostolic dimension without limits, just as the Gospel of Jesus is without limits” (Capuchin Order 1978). This awareness is rooted in the teaching of Vatican II that notes that the Church itself is missionary by her very nature.²¹ Additionally, missiologists have boldly clarified that it is mission that existed before there was Church. Thus, it is not the Church that has a mission, but the *Missio Dei* that spawned a church.²² Building on the teachings of his predecessors, especially Pope Paul VI (d. 1978),²³ Pope Francis has both reiterated and clarified the central role of Evangelization for the Church, and the call for all baptized to realize their vocation as missionary disciples.²⁴

Capuchin Provinces have traditionally been expected to have some external mission beyond the borders of the province: my own province has had them in Guam, Nicaragua and Panama as well as among Native Americans in Montana. This shift in an understanding from “having a mission” to “being missionary”, however, has challenged the way Capuchins and other Franciscans enter into ministry. In the Seventh Plenary Council of the Capuchin Order, fraternity is linked to minority and itinerancy. Living brotherhood in minority means divesting ourselves of privilege—including those that arise from office, education or presbyteral ministry.²⁵ It presumes a commitment to teamwork.²⁶ It also requires giving up “positions of publicly acknowledged, assured power, and [choosing] instead those that are more accessible to the ordinary and poorest people”.²⁷ A specific consideration should be about choosing ministries that “express the fraternal nature of our charism”, which translates into “ministries that do not require priestly ordination”.²⁸ While retaining our service to the local and universal church, Capuchins are called to “give priority to ministries that are more in keeping with our vocation as minors, assuming pastoral commitments on the boundaries”.²⁹ Our constitutions are specific in their caution about parish ministry that needs to be done only after prudent reflection. Preferred parochial situations are those “where we can more easily give witness to minority and live

²¹ *Ad Gentes*, no. 2.

²² Key here is the work of David Bosch (1991).

²³ See his 1975 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World), (Paul VI 1975).

²⁴ See his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), nos. 119–21, (Francis 2013).

²⁵ PCO VII, no. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.* no. 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.* no. 25.

²⁸ *Ibid.* no. 37.

²⁹ *Ibid.* no 38.

and work in brotherhood” (no. 154.3). Parallel advice is that such “parishes, diocesan services and other responsibilities that induce stability should only be taken on for a limited time”.³⁰ As Minister General of the Order, John Corriveau summed up these developments in his 2002 circular letter when he states “It can no longer authentically be asserted that the Order’s principal role is to serve its various ministries, but rather: ‘Saint Francis founded the fraternity of the Order of Minors which would bear witness to the reign of God by a sharing of life and by preaching penance and peace through example and word (Const. 3.1)’” (Corriveau 2002).

One of the side effects of the growing clericalization of the Order was the eventual diocesanization and parochialization of the Order. In the establishment of my own province, our leaders—originally diocesan priests—were eager to accept parishes in Milwaukee, New York and other places as a way to establish the order. This process placed the staffing and administration of parishes high on personnel agenda. Many of them were in marginalized communities, but were seldom understood as temporary commitments.

There has been a notable turning away from parochial ministry in my own province. On the one hand, this could be the result of diminished numbers that disallow such staffing. I would like to think, however, that part of this process of deparochialization is an intentional gesture toward environments more conducive to community life, an affirmation of minority in ministry, and a step toward an itinerant freedom to pursue more ministries at the margins.

5. Intellectual Tradition

A third decolonizing turn is symbolized in the Franciscan commitment to reappropriate our intellectual tradition.

One facet of this work that often first comes to mind regarding our intellectual tradition is the continuing scholarship in service of excavating, editing and publishing primary textual sources. The 19th century witnessed a critical edition of the *Omnia Opera* of Bonaventure known as the Quaracchi edition, which continues to be an ongoing project.³¹ Further, the 20th century marked an era of a proliferation of such scholarship including the critical editions of the writings of John Duns Scotus (1950, Scotus 1997–2006), William of Ockham (de Ockham 1974–1988, de Ockham 1967–1988) as well as multiple lesser figures. Besides these critical editions, there has also been a flurry of scholarly translations of the works of these luminaries³² as well as other Franciscan saints and mystics such as Angela of Foligno (Angela of Foligno 1993).

Notable, of course, is the work of Kajetan Esser (d. 1978) who a few years before his death published his critical edition of the complete works of St. Francis (Esser 1978). Esser’s work, along with Jean-François Godet and George Mailleux’s computerized analysis of Esser’s work (Godet and Mailleux 1976–1990), helped fuel new scholarly energy around the writings of Francis, Clare and other early sources of the Franciscan movement. The splendid three volume work *Francis of Assisi* (Armstrong et al. 1999–2001) by Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann and William Short and the reedited documents of Clare of Assisi by Armstrong (2006) built on this ground breaking work. Aside from these critical and translated editions of writings from the early Franciscan movement, there has been an explosion of other scholarly writings about the Franciscan charism, spirituality and theology, which often draw heavily upon these important textual sources.

Much Franciscan research in the 19th and 20th century, of which such critical editions are exemplars, strove to affirm the academic credibility of this research, which required the deployment of new critical skills—most ordinarily scientific textual methods, especially as they developed in biblical scholarship and became widely accepted in the academy. There was clear evidence, however, that this

³⁰ Ibid. no. 39.

³¹ See Pietro Maranesi’s discussion of this edition and its ongoing work (Maranesi 2014), especially pp. 66–74.

³² For example, the ongoing project at the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure to published translations of the works of St. Bonaventure.

important scholarship seemed disconnected from the actual living the Franciscan charism.³³ Some considered Franciscanism a “school” that should be studied and appreciated alongside the Augustinian and Dominican intellectual traditions (Marcil 1994; McGinn 1993). The irony, however, is that the origins of the Franciscan intellectual tradition are not found in theological or philosophical speculation or writings, but in the spiritual vision of Francis and Clare (Osborne 2003, p. 32ff): more a school of spirituality than theology.³⁴ This resulted in palpable disparity between what some considered “elitist” academic frameworks and the lived experience of the Franciscan tradition.

This awareness that “the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition has had little or no influence on the contemporary form of Franciscan life”,³⁵ has spurred action from both the academic and pastoral axes of this tradition. From a pastoral perspective, the writings of Francis, Clare and other early sources are now regularly part of initial formation programs, at least for 1st Order Franciscan men in the U.S. From an academic perspective, there has been a push for what some have called the “domestication” of the tradition, that is, rendering it accessible and understandable to the Franciscan family especially in the English-speaking world.³⁶ Notable examples of this work are Ilia Delio’s very readable introduction to Bonaventure (Delio 2013), and Mary Beth Ingham’s delightful *Scotus for Dunces* (Ingham 2003).

6. The Turn to Decoloniality

As previously noted, at least from the viewpoint of many South American thinkers, decolonization has much to do with the exercise of economic and political control. Decoloniality, on the other hand, while clearly concerned about the spheres of economy and politics, can be more properly characterized as an epistemic movement that rejects Euro-American centrism and the philosophical traditions emerging from those centers, and instead values indigenous forms of knowledge and aesthetics, wisdom and art. It was the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano who distilled the concept of coloniality—specifically the coloniality of power—as a way of addressing the dominance of Eurocentric forms of knowledge and exposing the underlying logic of Western civilization.³⁷ Thus, it could be synonymous with “decolonial thinking and doing”, rendering it not only a political project but an epistemic one as well.

While Franciscans have made great strides in what could be considered the decolonization of our legacy, the decolonializing of the legacy continues to be our future work. For example, the Franciscan charism of “fraternity” continues to be a siloed affair. While there is some movement in this “post-*Ite Vos*” era towards inter-obediential collaboration³⁸—including a growing collaboration between the Order of Friars Minor (OFM), Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap.), Order of Friars Minor Conventual (OFM Conv.) and Third Order Regular (TOR) minister generals—such is largely between First Order men’s communities, and as yet has had little impact beyond that considerable yet limited circle.

In recent years, there has been some talk about Franciscan sister/brotherhood, or more interesting, what some of our sisters consider the Franciscan-Clarean charism and lifestyle.³⁹ In my experience, however, the concept of *fraternitas* among First Order men’s communities seldom extends in tangible ways to the many other friars in the world—especially those reform groups who have distanced themselves from OFM, OFM Cap., and OFM Conv. jurisdictions. Then, of course, there are the tens of thousands of Franciscan sisters throughout the world, and the members of the Secular Franciscans.

³³ See the parallel discussion on decoloniality’s critique of the “delinking” of local knowledges and praxis from that of Eurocentric “scientific” forms of knowing in Mignolo (2018, p. 365).

³⁴ See Walter Principe’s distinction between spirituality as a living reality, teaching about that reality (e.g., a “school”) and the discipline or study of that reality in Principe (1983).

³⁵ (Delio 2002), synthesized online at https://www.franciscantradition.org/images/stories/custodians/CUST10_Ilia_FINAL.pdf.

³⁶ Joseph Chinnici (2000), “North American Stewardship of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition,” p. 5 as cited in Delio, op. cit.

³⁷ e.g., (Quijano 2000); Mignolo clearly credits Quijano with this foundation formulation in his 2018 article noted above.

³⁸ cf. (Foley 2019).

³⁹ Cf. Margaret Guider (2019, p. 101).

If the Franciscan charism of *fraternitas* is appropriately symbolized in the “mixed community” metaphor, lay and ordained of equal dignity, does that not implicate women and men in such a view of community? Does the expanding legacy of *fraternitas* have a place for *sororitas* in its future? Maybe one small move in this direction would be the recognition of Clare of Assisi as a Co-Patron of the Franciscan orders.⁴⁰

Regarding our missionary legacy with its strands of hierarchicalization, clericalization and parochialization, we have made great strides. On the other hand, the clerical specter still haunts our charism. One of the most pointed examples of this continued colonization regards the appointment of local and major superiors. While there is the growing acceptance in my own province of lay friars as local ministers, there continues to be great difficulty in having lay friars elected major superiors. My province elected a lay friar as provincial minister in 2002, and that election was postulated by that provincial chapter of mats. The election, however, was not confirmed by Rome. While it is true that the election of a lay friar as minister provincial of the Denver Province was recently approved in 2019, this is enough of an exception to be notable.

It is true that there is a canonical obstacle for lay friars to be elected major superiors, and in 2017 the ministers general of the OFM, OFM Cap, OFM Conv. and TOR requested a canonical dispensation from Pope Francis,⁴¹ though such is yet forthcoming. I would contend, however, that it is not simply the canonical impediment that is at issue here. First Order Franciscan communities have been clericalized for so long, that a deep-seated priestly prerogative persists, especially among those whose formation segregated them for ordination studies. The previously noted changes in initial formation programs can certainly contribute to this decolonialization and enhance our understanding of mission and mission effectiveness beyond clerical paradigms. I would contend that the practical intersection of *fraternitas* with *sororitas* and with whatever neologism properly embraces the lay members of the Franciscan family (*laiciitas*) will also contribute to the declericalization of our charism and, thus, our vision of mission.

Finally, to our intellectual tradition. One of the useful insights about our intellectual tradition that has emerged over the past few decades is not only recognizing that this tradition broadly speaking is rooted in the spiritual vision of Francis and Clare, but that these two patrons of this tradition can be rightly understood as vernacular⁴², or what I would consider “practical theologians”. These were mystics who theologized out of their own experience and contexts in their search for new ways of understanding and approach God. This “remaining in the world” approach to theologizing is what birthed the Franciscan tradition, though this style of theologizing eventually ceded authority to more academic and scholastic forms of theologizing.

A decolonialized vision of such vernacular theologizing cedes priority to theologizing not only from below, but also from the margins.⁴³ Ramón Grosfoguel believes this is essential for the development of “border” ways of knowing or “border epistemologies” (Grosfoguel 2005). He further contends, from his own experience, that there is too much theorizing “about” subaltern situations, and too little theorizing with and from a subaltern perspective (Grosfoguel 2007).

Given that the most notable growth in vocations to First Order Franciscans is in Asia and Africa,⁴⁴ nourishing our intellectual tradition would seem to require engagement with these collaborators. Happily, my own province invites a growing number of younger friars from places like Ethiopia and

⁴⁰ This idea was generated by the American Franciscan Liturgical Commission in their attempt to produce a “Franciscan” supplement to the Roman Missal: a project on which this author spent over a decade, but has never come to fruition.

⁴¹ <https://catholicerald.co.uk/news/2017/04/11/franciscan-superiors-ask-pope-francis-to-allow-brothers-to-be-elected-leaders/>.

⁴² See the distinctions between monastic, scholastic and vernacular forms of theology in McGinn (1998).

⁴³ See, for example, (Mignolo 2018).

⁴⁴ The most recent statistics from our general curia indicate that while Europe has the most perpetually professed brothers (3778), they have 178 brothers in temporary vows and 48 novices, whereas South America has 255 brothers in temporary vows and 70 novices, Africa has 415 brothers in temporary vows and 81 novices, and Asia has 631 friars in temporary vows and 159 novices (over triple that of the Europeans).

India to come study with us. While that is useful, it is seldom a nourishment of border epistemologies but instead seems to be training such brothers to think like Euro-Americans, often transmitting what could be considered an “imperial epistemology”.

While I understand the value of training folk in classical ways of thinking, we also need to accompany our Franciscan sisters and brothers into developing new ways not only of embodying the Franciscan charism in their lives, but also thinking about that legacy, particularly in non-Western categories and outside of Euro-centric systems. While I do not have experience mentoring that work in Franciscan studies, I do have extensive experience in guiding folk to develop vernacular or practical theologies from their own context, not essentially reliant upon Western categories.⁴⁵ This endeavor would be greatly enhanced to the extent that the West not only invites the East, and the North invites those from the South to study with us, but we take seriously their own indigenous forms of knowing, and send folk to learn and think with them.

7. Conclusions

The goal here is not a redefinition of Franciscan heritage, but instead a case study in method. Francis and Clare were provocative in their determination to live an unvarnished Gospel, and challenged the church and society of their day that was impaired in this living. Decolonizing and decolonializing frames are analogously provocative. Maybe they, as well, can turn us toward a Gospel and Franciscan charism more unvarnished and a legacy more enduring.

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⁴⁵ A recent example is a Jewish Rabbi in our professional doctoral program who developed a distinctively Jewish form of theological reflection, something to my knowledge [or hers] hitherto attempted. See (Bahle 2019).

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