

Bringing out of our storehouse the flesh and blood of our tradition in such a way as to feed future generations . . .

The Prophetic Heart (1994) — Joseph P. Chinnici OFM



The TAU

From the time of Ezekiel the sign of the TAU, marked on the forehead of those turning to God in faith and repentance has long represented faithfulness and wholehearted love. It was used for healing and victory.

Pope Innocent III, evoked the sign of the TAU from Ezekiel when opening the Fourth Lateran Council in 1216 calling for the renewal of the Church, “Mercy will be granted to those to bear the TAU, a mark of a life of penance and renewal in Christ.”

And so Francis, who was present at the Council, wanted to sign himself with the TAU, and his brothers along with him. The TAU became the sign of the little Band’s mission: the preaching of faith and repentance (Rule of 1221:23).

Thomas of Celano, writing in 1252, notes, “The TAU symbol had, above all others, his preference. Francis used it as a signature for his letters, and he painted a drawing of it on the walls of all the cells.” One of these paintings, believed to be created by Francis, is found in the little chapel of Mary Magdalen at Fonte Columbo in the Rieti Valley where Francis wrote his Rule.

Another very precious document, housed in the Basilica of St. Francis, is Francis’ own handwritten blessing for Brother Leo — signed with the TAU.

Above all else, the TAU meant mission for Francis: a mission to proclaim the Goodness of God by a wholehearted following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ because of whom all life is sacred.



The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition Initiative A Language of God-with-us

Joseph P. Chinnici OFM



Can we speak in the midst of our own social and ecclesial location a language of God-with-us, a language of life, a language of ritual, a language of social witness, a language of the intellect that, for our own time, will have us “do what is ours to do” in this Christian Catholic Franciscan way of gospel life? Such is the CFIT’s purpose and hope in seeking companions on the way.

Joe Chinnici OFM. Introduction to #1 of the Franciscan Heritage Series, 2003.

CONTEXT

In February, 2000, **Joe Chinnici OFM** addressed twenty-one Franciscan scholars, tracing the historical development of Studies in the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition, and highlighting all the collaborative efforts of symposiums, forums and conferences in the past 25 years in the USA. This Colloquium held at Our Lady of Angels Convent, Aston, PA, and sponsored by the Franciscan Institute, Director: Margaret Carney OSF, was an invaluable stepping stone toward the creation of a new Commission on the FIT [Franciscan Intellectual Tradition] by the OFM Leadership one month later in Colorado Springs, CO.

GOAL

The Commission’s goal is the development of the FIT as a vital resource for the animation of the Franciscan Family and as an alternative theological tradition within the Church. Giving his report to the OFM Leadership, 2001, Joe writes,

When the tradition in its view of God’s overflowing goodness, its Christocentric emphasis, its moral-decision making process, its view of a Spirit-filled yet sinful Church, its understanding of property and community, and its valuation of freedom and personal dignity, is presented, it almost always meets with an enthusiastic reception.

**But do we really know this tradition?
Are our resources mobilized so as to protect it and update it?**

Our purpose in retrieving and revitalizing the tradition is thus subordinate to our mission to give people hope, speak to their fears, and present a coherent intellectual pathway which strengthens faith and encourages just action for our neighbors.

PRIMARY CONCERNS

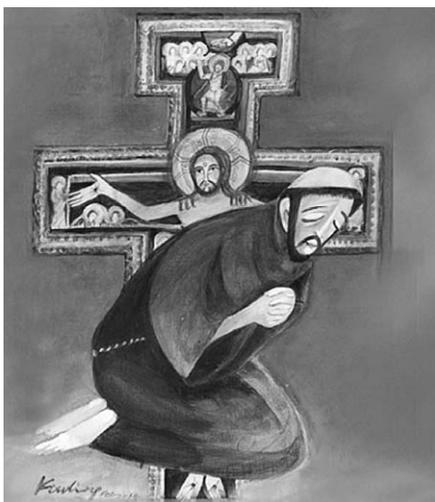
The Strategic Plan of the CFIT Task Force names these areas of concern:

- Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Identify major themes.
- Formators/Formation: Education and Preparation
- Study Centers: Network and Collaborate
- New scholars: Identify and encourage
- New learning opportunities: New website and distance learning.

In his March, 2001 report to the English Speaking Conference of the OFM's, Joe Chinnici states the following assumptions if the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition is going to make a vital contribution to the life of the Church, Franciscan family, and the world. It must:

- Be taught/communicated: *What is believed?*
- Be made accessible (published resources available for use in a variety of forums): *How will I know it?*
- Be supported by formative experiences that are lived and reflected on in the company of sisters and brothers whose life and ministry gives witness to its truth, values, and alternative ways of being in the Church and world. To put it another way: *How does belief enlighten and shape both life and ministry?*

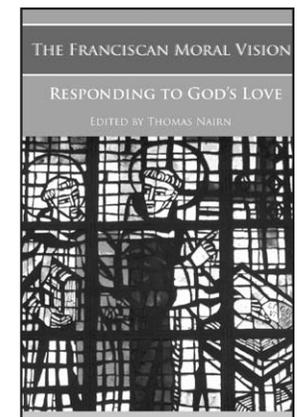
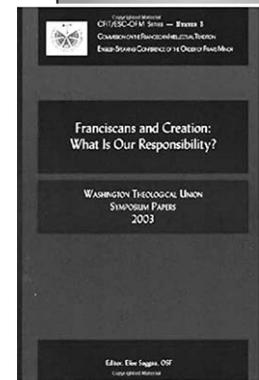
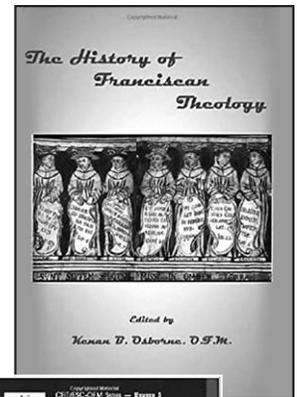
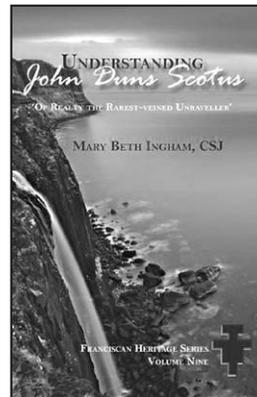
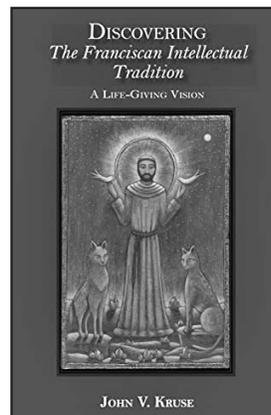
The Commission also recognized that the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition is rich in insights as to how the Christian message might intersect with the fields of politics, economics, psychology, sociology, and environmental studies.



RESOURCES

After addressing “Retrieving and Communicating the FIT,” the Strategic Plan suggests that *resources be developed* which invite a widening circle of adult learners into a greater knowledge of various aspects of Franciscan Theology and Spirituality.*

The Plan states that persons need to be *formed and trained* to think theologically as Franciscans who are prepared to speak an evangelizing word in contemporary situation.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

We are called to engage our neighbor in following the footprints of Our Lord and in the way of Francis and Clare . . . Our Franciscan tradition has tended to separate the insights of spirituality from the insights of academic theology; the inspiration and intuition of Francis from the institutional work of Bonaventure and the philosophical-theological vision of Scotus.

Francis encountered God in the condition of being human: in that which was most disfigured, most marginated, most excluded, poor; in the unbeliever and in a church that was disfigured.

Francis found a language to express this intuition about God-with-us in

his prayers, his letters, his Rule, his symbolic texts of Crib, Cross, Eucharist, and the human and graced text of his own life. Those who followed the first brothers inherited this intuition, confronted the problems of their times, and, in different languages still tried to express this great vision of *God-with-us*.

Herein lay a basic continuity between Francis, Clare, Thomas of Celano, the Three Companions, John of Perugia, Angela of Foligno, Elizabeth of Hungary, Bonaventure, Peter John Olivi, Scotus and so many others. In the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition we find again and again, in different languages, the same fundamentals of our vision of the Catholic Christian life.

Dr. Kenan Osborne OFM, in the first volume of the *Franciscan Heritage Series*, gives a few indicators:

1. *God's presence and universal accessibility in Christ* — in creation, in the poor, in the non-event, in the non-believer
2. *God as a community of persons . . . a Trinity, sharing life and goods* — a model for fraternity, social peace, relationality, mission and the exchange of goods between persons.
3. *God's gratuity and liberality to be with us, even in a creaturely disfigured way* — in Christ's birth, life and passion; in each unique creature; the great gift of the Church with its people, priests, theologians and sacraments and doctrine and teaching magisterium;
4. *God's human way of exercising authority, creating order and "being with."* — through example, humility, courtesy, respect and love-willing-to-suffer with the neighbor.

Embedded in this vision and communicated in this Franciscan Intellectual Tradition are implications for the world of politics, economics, social relations, family life and daily human existence. *Can we speak in the midst of our own social and ecclesial location a language of God-with-us, a language of life; a language of ritual; a language of*



social witness; a language of the intellect that, for our own time, will have us "do what is ours to do" in this Christian Catholic Franciscan way of gospel life?

COMMITMENT

At the conclusion of their "Working Document on the FIT," [June, 2001] **Ilia Delio OSF and Bill Short OFM** write,

At this point it becomes crucial for us to undertake the next steps, which will bring the tradition into dialogue with today's questions: in regard to Christian faith, the life of the Church, the world of science and culture, and the needs and longings of the human family . . .

Our Franciscan tradition has a "word" to speak today, one that responds to deeply-felt needs in our Church and our world. Our tradition can help to articulate a viable way of being Christian in the world today;

- *As brothers and sisters*
- *In harmony with the natural environment*
- *In solidarity with the marginalized and oppressed*
- *In reduced consumption of the earth's resources.*

And for all these concerns we can offer a "word" from an ancient and eloquent tradition, giving an account of the hope that is in us.

But that word will be lost, and that alternative vision will disappear if we do not take steps in these **critical years** at the threshold of the millennium to **retrieve, preserve, and articulate** that tradition in a language that is understandable to the men and women and the issues of our day.

WHO else if not us?
WHEN else if not now?

* Publication of *Proceedings of the Annual Washington Theological Union, DC* which was a gathering designed to interface the major theological themes of the Tradition with contemporary issues. N.B. www.franciscantradition.org.

Examples:

- *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition, WTU Symposium 2001*
- *Franciscan Identity and Postmodern Culture – 2002*
- *Poverty and Prosperity: Franciscans and the Use of Money – 2009*

Franciscan Heritage Series, published by the Franciscan Institute, Joseph Chinnici OFM, General Editor. These are a series of booklets designed to make available some of the dominant basic themes in the Franciscan Tradition to every phase of service: pastoral, academic, formation, JPIC ministry, etc.

Examples:

- *Franciscan View of the Human Person: Some Central Elements*, 2005, Dawn Nothwehr OSF
- *Understanding John Duns Scotus*, 2017, Mary Beth Ingham CSJ
- *A Franciscan View of Creation*, 2003, Ilia Delio OSF
- See www.franciscantradition.org

These are available at Franciscan Institute Publications.
www.franciscanpublications.com

CUSTODIANS of the Tradition: Two to eight page synthesis of the best of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition in printed and web-paged format. See www.franciscantradition.org and www.franciscancollegesuniversities.org.

Examples:

- *Give an Account of the Hope That Is Within You*, William Short OFM
- *Insights for a Value-Centered Life from the Franciscan Tradition*, Edward Coughlin OFM
- *The Cosmos, a Symbol of the Divine*, Zachary Hayes OFM

SOURCE: General Editor's Introduction to Heritage Series #1 — *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Tracing Its Origins and Identifying Its Central Components*, v-xiii, March 19, 2003, Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778.

AUTHOR: **Joseph Chinnici OFM** Friar of the *Province of Saint Barbara, CA* is the President Emeritus of the *Franciscan School of Theology*, San Diego University, CA. Professor of Church and Franciscan Theology and History; former Minister Provincial (1988-1997); author of prize-winning books, Joe has been at the helm of some of the most significant initiatives towards the revitalization of Franciscan life today. From his 1984 seminal work with fellow FST scholar, Bill Short OFM, introducing the study of *Franciscan Evangelical Life . . .* to the 2001 creation of the new OFM Commission on the Retrieval of the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition (CFIT), and then onto serving as President of FST in its decision to re-locate to the University of San Diego, CA, Joe's vision, and scholarship has ushered in a "sea change" in the Franciscan Movement of the 21st Century.



With a D.Phil from Oxford University, Joe authored the ground-breaking work, *Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in the United States*, as well as significant studies on the history of prayer and the reception of Vatican II in the U.S.

Joe Chinnici's Orbis 2010 book *When Values Collide: The Catholic Church Sexual Abuse, and the Challenges of Leadership* was awarded *First Place* for Pastoral Ministry by the Catholic Press Association in 2011. Once launched, CFIT sponsored over ten editions of *The Franciscan Heritage Series* (2003-2012) with Joe as General Editor. In 2013 the *Franciscan Institute* published *The Franciscan Moral Vision: Responding to God's Love* This milestone was eight years in preparation spearheaded by Joe Chinnici and edited by Thomas Nairn OFM. A Forum and Franciscan Federation keynote addresses soon followed. *The Forum X DVD Program* of Colorado Springs CO, 2014, with Presentations by Tom Nairn OFM, Mary Beth Ingham CSJ and Joe Chinnici OFM is available from Kathleen Moffatt OSF. Information: Moffatt.kathleen@comcast.net

In the Spring of 2021, Joe, considered the premier historian of American Catholic Life and Thought, completed his long awaited book, ***American Catholicism Transformed: From the Cold War Through the Council***. This "masterful study without parallel" is published by Oxford University Press, New York, NY.

Synthesized by Carol Beckerman OSF, a *Franciscan Sister of Our Lady of Perpetual Help* from Kirkwood, MO. Carol has served in education in Trinidad, CO, Bastrop, LA, St. Louis, MO, Chicago Heights, IL, Merrillville, IN, and Omaha, NE; Mission Integration Associate Administrator for her congregation's sponsored health care center in Green Springs, OH; and Congregational Leadership for 10 years. Her ministry has also included Catholic Charities Area Director for Effingham, IL in the Diocese of Springfield, IL, and as a member of the Franciscan Formation/Mission Integration committee of the Board of the Hospital Sisters Health System in Springfield, IL.

ART: Lee Kowling, Singapore
www.franciscans.org or kowling90@gmail.com



This TAU Series . . . TOR #18 can be downloaded for free from
The International Franciscan Conference, TOR Rome, Italy, www.ifc-tor.org

For additional information, contact Kathleen Moffatt OSF, General Editor, moffatt.kathleen@comcast.net

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