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Attributed. Sir Francis Drake-1577



BECOMING A DISTURBING PRESENCE
IN TODAY'S WORLD:
**CHRIST, THROUGH FRANCIS,
CLARE AND... ME!**
ASSISI, ITALY
16 - 22 May 2009

Editorial

The current issue of *Propositum* gives an overall picture of the General Assembly of the International Franciscan Conference of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular held in Assisi from 16-22 May 2009.

The theme of the General Assembly **Becoming a Disturbing Presence in Today's World: Christ, through Francis, Clare and ...Me** is very challenging. In reality, none of us desire to be disturbed. As human nature we all wish to live a very peaceful and smooth life. And we don't wish others to be disturbed by our actions and presence as well. But on the other hand there is a 'Blissful Disturbance'. This disturbance in our life changes our attitude, outlook, way of life, and finally we become a disturbing presence in the world in the "Presence". Mary was deeply disturbed by the words of Angel Gabriel sent by God (cf. Lk, 1: 26-29). Francis and Clare experienced this kind of disturbance in their life and they became a disturbing presence in the world in their times and even today. We hope this Blissful Disturbance in our life will lead us to deepen our vision and charism. Also it brings a certain transformation giving us hope and enthusiasm for a new life.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to the outgoing IFC-TOR Council and congratulate the new Council.

You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit (Jn. 15:16).

Sister Daria Koottiyaniel FCC



From Left:

Sr. Jessy Augustine Payyapilly, AFBP
Sr. Janet Gardner, OSF (Vice President)
Fr. James F. Puglisi, SA (President)
Sr. Louise Hembrecht, OSF
Sr. Doreen D'Souza, UFS
Sr. Mary Xavier Bomberger, OSF

Becoming a Disturbing Presence in Today's World: Christ, through Francis, Clare and ... ME!

**General Assembly of the IFC-TOR
Assisi, Domus Pacis
16-22 May 2009**

Introduction

In this issue of *Propositum*, we present the results of the General Assembly of the International Franciscan Conference of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular.

The Assembly provided the opportunity for the Minister Generals or Delegates of 101 Congregations who follow the TOR Rule to gather and reflect on how our TOR Rule and *forma vitae* is to disturb the world in which we live.

This theme derives from the understanding of what happened to both Francis and Clare in their encounter with Christ.

Francis encountered a Christ in the midst of a life full of activity centered around himself. He was never happy. He felt that there was something beyond but didn't know what this was until he encountered Christ on the dilapidated crucifix in San Damiano. He was deeply disturbed by this encounter which he could not fully make sense of in his mind and in his heart. He understood (incorrectly) the challenge that was given to him of rebuilding the house of God. His experience was like the unfolding of an onion that is peeled back layer by layer until nothing is left. In the stripping off of the layers of his external person he eventually stood naked before not only his natural father but also before this Christ who had called him and disturbed him until he had to face his real self.

Francis in his inner self began to experience this "peace that disturbs". His concerns turned from earthly pleasures to that of finding perfect joy in serving that which was most repulsive to him. He found happiness in poverty, in serving, in not counting self before serving God, in emptying himself out and creating a space for the other. He began to appear as a presence in his own society that caused much disturbance. It was like he was slowly becoming that same disturbing presence that provoked a radical change in his own life. So much was this so that some thought him insane, others feared him because of the radical witness that he gave and the searing glance he offered that burned through the most hardened exterior and enveloped the other in love. In any event he knew that his life had to be different in the following of Jesus; it had to be so radical that it would eventually lead him to the profound knowledge of the love that Christ exhibited on the cross of sinners like himself. He longed to be united to the Crucified one in a physical way. With the gift of the stigmata, at that moment of mystical union, Bonaventure says, "Francis became prayer".

Clare, too, encountered the Christ of pure love even before Francis. She became a presence that disturbed her whole household and all of the courtly ladies of Assisi by breaking with the long held traditions for women in the Medieval, feudal society. Her courage upset the ecclesiastical authorities. Clare teaches us to gaze, consider, contemplate as we desire to imitate. To look is to be changed by what we see. Her radiance was her poverty, her simplicity, her burning love of Christ to be able to abandon all in the pursuit of her beloved. Together with Francis they turned the church, the society and the world inside out.

How do we as Franciscans disturb the world in which we live? How do we bring pax et bonum in such a way that our presence leads others to the only true peace and the highest Good? How does God continue to disturb us in calling us through the Holy Spirit to live anew the Rule that gives us life? What groans do we hear as the Spirit brings to new life our TOR Rule for the next generation? Do our Congregations believe enough in the penitential movement Francis and Clare lived in their time to actively invite and call others to live this way of life in our times? Do we pray as Franciscans to become aware, to be disturbed, by the cries of the lepers of today, the cries of the new poor today, the cries of the innocent and defenseless today and the very cries of our created world for protection and redemption? How do we become a disturbing presence through service? What happens to our prophets in our own communities, to those who dare to imagine the possibilities and ask "What if?" and "Why not?". Can we see the paths that lead back to Christ through a variety of cultures so that we discover our stories intertwined in the one great story of Jesus? These are some of the questions that we explored during the week in the Assembly. We began writing a new chapter of our Franciscan way of life whereby we commit ourselves to call and form new members to follow, not in our footsteps, but in the same foot steps of Christ as disturbing disciples.

After the key note introduction given by Fr. Tony Gittins, CSSp the Assembly worked in five language groups to reflect on some of these questions. The goal was to come up with a vision statement for the coming years for the Congregations of the TOR and to make recommendations to the newly elected Council of the IFC-TOR.

Our days together were punctuated with contemplative prayer on Franciscan sources and lectio

divina, shared reflection and meditation on the very Word that gives us life and sustains us. The IFC-TOR has made these available on the web site (www.ifc-tor.org) so that your Communities may also share in the experience that was energizing for the whole Assembly.

We encourage all of you to take up our vision statement and recommendations and find ways to implement them in your own Congregations. They may be useful for meditation and reflection for your Assemblies in the future.

Fr. James F. Puglisi, SA
President,
IFC-TOR

Opening Ritual Homily

Mons. Domenico Sorrentino
Bishop of Assisi

Dear Brothers and Sisters, I would first like to welcome you as Bishop of Assisi. I suppose that, as you are Franciscan, you feel at home here. I want to welcome you in the name of the whole diocesan community.

The theme of your assembly is very stimulating: becoming a disturbing presence in the world today: Christ through Francis, Clare and ...Me.!

We must admit that our tendency is to prefer a not disturbing Christianity. We are afraid that the announcement of the Gospel in its radicality makes us lose consent in the society. We make the faith acceptable, avoiding the scandal of the cross, which is the scandal of the love. "God so loved the World that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). We must rediscover the strength of this announcement. The Word of God helps us.

We have just heard: "You are the salt of the earth, but if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything. (Mt 10:34). We can meditate the same thing in the Light of others words of Christ.

Let us focus on the issue of the peace, which is so important in the Franciscan Spirituality. It is a duty to preach peace. But what does peace mean? We read in the Gospel words which seem to be in contradiction. When Christ promises Peace, he adds that his peace is different from the peace of the World: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the World gives do I give it to you" (Jn 14:27). It is the character of the Gospel not to be of this World. It is a message of Peace. But this peace requires struggle.

Christ is a sign of contradiction. Also the Apostle Paul confirms this message. He tried to preach in Athens a Christian faith that could be accepted. We too must try to make us understood by the people of our time. But Paul experienced that there is a point where the announcement becomes a sign of contradiction. The announcement in Athens was a failure. When he preached in Corinth, he chose to preach from the very beginning the crucified Lord. To be Christian is disturbing. In a time of new

evangelization we must rediscover this character. Who more than Francis-together with Clara-can help us?

Pope Benedict, in his visit to Assisi, invited us to read the life and the message of the poverello, starting from his conversion. In its Testament, Francis speaks of his whole life as a life of penance: a life of conversion. And conversion for Francis was to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel, imitating Christ's way of life. It is a paradox that our presentation of Francis is sometimes more acceptable than our presentation of Christ. It is a paradox, yet we can understand this. Francis can be honored and accepted as a great man, with a great message about issues which are very important for our society: ecology, peace, inter-religious dialogue. Christ is not only a great man: he is God-man, the Word made flesh.

The radicality of the life of Francis, the radicality of poverty in the spirituality of Clare cannot be understood, if we do not start from this. Christ was everything for Francis and Clare. Only this explains the symbolic and prophetic "divestiture" he made in front of Bishop Guido, in the house where I have the privilege to live. Only this explains that he wanted to choose complete poverty and die naked on the naked earth, in this holy place of the Portiuncola. Francis chose a disturbing presence, because he chose Christ.

I wish and pray that in this occasion of your assembly you can listen to the voice of the Spirit of God, in order to choose the best ways to give testimony to Christ without any fear of a disturbing presence in the World today.

Opening Talk

IFC-TOR General Assembly Assisi, May 16, 2009

Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770-1850)

William Wordsworth was one of the English Romantic Poets and a "Nature" poet. Though a conventional enough Christian, he respected "Nature" rather than "God," and "spirit" rather than "Spirit." He certainly believes in a spirit of nature or some entity much larger than himself and humanity, and in the notion that every human being had a moral core and a moral responsibility

As a young man he traveled to France shortly after the French Revolution of 1789, hoping to discover palpable signs of the *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité* that had been its rallying cry. He came away disillusioned by the horror, bloodshed, and lingering discontent and injustices he found. Returning to England in a pensive if not depressed mood, he undertook a walking tour on the borders of England and Wales, and wrote, among other things, the famous poem that is known as Tintern Abbey. It is not about the abbey but about his own thoughts, and it contains these lines, written at the age of twenty-eight in 1798:

I have learned
To look on Nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity ...

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused, ...
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

As a Junior Seminarian (1957-61), I lived in “Wordsworth Country” in the Lake District of Northern England. I also studied this poem and others by Wordsworth. But years later, in the 1990s, I came across it again and was much more deeply affected and challenged by its sentiments. Consequently, in 1998 – the 200th anniversary of the poem – I made a special trip (or pilgrimage) to Tintern Abbey, a twelfth century Cistercian Abbey but now a ruin since the time of Henry VIII in the 1530s. On a cold morning I climbed over an iron fence and sat, poem in hand, in the bare, ruined choir of the abbey. And as part of my morning meditation I asked God’s Spirit to make me feel something similar to what Wordsworth had felt: “a presence that disturbs.”

A DISTURBING GOD

The image of “the still, sad music of humanity,” and of “a motion and a spirit that impels all thinking things,” resonated deeply with me on that day and in subsequent days, and I sensed an increasing clarity in my own thinking about God, about the human response, and about human responsibility generally. This resolved itself into three rather simple ideas: God is a disturbing God; we need to ask to be disturbed; and we must in turn become a disturbing presence.

A DISTURBING GOD:

The Hebrew Bible tells us time and again, and in many different words and images, that the God of the People of Israel was not a Deus Otiosus, a withdrawn or distant God, but a God of relationship, of involvement, of Covenant, and of Faithfulness. God is always seeking to speak and to be heard by God’s people, to lead them forward and to forgive their errant ways, and not to leave them alone or abandoned. Time and again God reassures the people: “Even if a mother should forget her child, I will never forget you” (Isaiah 49:15); “If I forget you Jerusalem, may my right hand wither” (Ps 137:5); “I will never forget you my people” (Is 49:15); “The Lord will not forget the Covenant” (Deut 4:31); “God does not forget the cry of the afflicted” (Ps 9:12); and so on. Since God is a relational God, who seeks to maintain relationships, and since people are often complacent or forgetful, God necessarily disturbs in order to do so.

WE MUST ASK TO BE DISTURBED:

The God who disturbs however, is never coercive. God will never force people against their will, but will reiterate the invitation to relationship and even forgive indefinitely. Consequently, if people want to be in relationship with the God who offers to be in relationship, they themselves must seek, ask, and choose to be disturbed. To fail to do so is to opt to be alone and not in relationship. Only those who want, or are willing, to be disturbed will be appropriately disturbed by a loving, compassionate, relational God. Biblical scholar James J. G. Dunn puts it very well: “There is a disturbing quality about the urgency of Jesus’ call, a shaking of the foundations, that those who want a quiet life are bound to resent and resist.” In other words, God may well be persistent in disturbing us (because it sometimes takes us a while before we notice or respond), but we may still choose to resent and resist, rather than to acquiesce and collaborate with God.

WE MUST BECOME A DISTURBING PRESENCE

It is nevertheless not enough for us merely to notice God’s disturbing presence, while trying to maintain the status quo ante: a comfortable, exclusive, or privatized relationship with God. A major reason that God disturbs us is in order to call and send us to be engaged with God’s world and God’s people: to be a sign of God’s presence in the world. The call that we identify as a vocation is only part of a cycle

(which we consider below). So it would be absolutely inappropriate for us to become a disturbance by throwing our weight around. Discipleship is not simply about us: we are not to become a self-important or self-focused disturbance, but must become an appropriately Godly disturbance. Only then will we be truly committed to the things of God, engaged with God, and complicit with God's purposes. These reflections, it seems to me, are both consistent with some of Wordsworth's own sentiments and with the fundamental Christian notion of social responsibility: we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

BECOMING AN APPROPRIATE DISTURBANCE

Just how we become an appropriate disturbance must be discerned and undertaken in the actual circumstances of our lives, or it will be found when and as we modify those circumstances so as to become more attuned and responsive to the God who disturbs. But three verbs come to mind, and each of them can be applied by anyone who wishes to become a Godly disturbance: identify, listen, and stand up.

IDENTIFY: It is easy to go through life with good intentions that are never grounded in action. Only after we have thought seriously about "the poor" in our midst or in the world, will we be able to respond concretely. "The poor" after all, is a phrase that refers to an abstraction, a category: but we cannot love an abstraction or a category, only real people. God does not make abstractions or "generics," but only persons, individually and specifically. Unless we identify some particular persons, we simply cannot claim to love them. "Muted groups" refers to members of any social class who are either voiceless or whose voice has been silenced. These are "the poor" in our world and in our midst. The first thing we can do therefore, is to identify some of these muted groups – women, children, abused persons, homeless people, strangers, prisoners, and so on. Only then we can make a real commitment to actual people.

LISTEN: On many occasions, Jesus calls people to listen to his message. He chides them for not listening, not hearing, and not acting. A central component of the ancient Israelites' definition of "human" was simply "having ears." The Shema or rallying cry for the Jews, found in Deuteronomy 6:4, runs: "Hear O Israel. Yahweh is our God, Yahweh alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength." Unless we listen and hear, we will not, for all our good intentions, really love God. But if we do try to listen to God, we will surely hear God's Spirit speaking – through "the poor", through the muted groups, through women in the Church, through the call for Christian unity and an inclusive Eucharist, through the alienated Christians who have been excluded from, or disillusioned by the institutional Church. The Spirit is speaking: but are we really listening?

STAND UP: What does God ask of us, of me? "Only this, that you act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8). And how do we do that? We do it by making a stand, by standing up, by "going public" in a world that is bleeding and crying. Each of us can find ways to stand up for justice, to put ourselves and our lives on the line for God's justice and God's people. And each of us is actually required by our baptism – not to mention our commitment as religious women and men – to do so. We are called to act as priests (anointing people with the oil of gladness, and binding up their wounds) and prophets (speaking truth to power and advocating for and with the voiceless and muted people we know or know about. We are called to dialogue, to a dialogue of life, by which we actually model what we so easily talk about: compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation, and love. But a commitment to dialogue, as a commitment to priestly and prophetic action, can only be done if we are willing to stand up and be counted, and to encounter people as Jesus did, one by one.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

The strategy of Jesus is to encounter people in order to love them, to call them to faith, to heal them, and to challenge and send them as disciples. We can identify three stages in the process of "discipling."

CALL/ENCOUNTER: Sometimes – as with Peter and Andrew, James and John Matthew and Zacchaeus – Jesus calls people explicitly and dramatically. But at other times – as with the woman bent over for 18 years (Lk 13), the woman who anoints him at the house of Simon the leper (Mk 14), or the rich man (Mk

10) – there is no explicit call – but there is, and must be, an encounter. Whether then, by call or by encounter, and whether the encounter is initiated by Jesus or by a potential disciple, the first stage on the way to discipleship is the bringing together, face to face, of Jesus and another person.

DISTURBANCE/DISPLACEMENT: Here is the moment of truth, the moment when the would-be disciple is put to the test. Because Jesus is a disturbing presence, a presence that disturbs, he will disturb people's complacency, their plans, and their lives. If one becomes a disciple, one's life will never be the same again. The disturbance or displacement is the way people's lives are reoriented. From now on, they are followers, not leaders, and must know the critical difference between an initiative and a response. The rich man took an initiative, "and Jesus looked at him and loved him." But Jesus told him he lacked "one thing" – but the one thing was enormous, and simply too much for this man who wanted to hold the initiative, not have his life radically disturbed. And Jesus reminded his own inner core of disciples, "You did not choose me; no, I chose you, and sent you out to bear much fruit" (Jn 15). These are words that each of us must hear and take to heart.

SENDING FORTH/CO-MISSIONING: Discipleship is only complete or fully activated with the sending forth. But since we are not sent to do whatever we wish but rather the will of the one who sends us, we are co-missioned or incorporated into the mission of Jesus – which in fact is God's own mission, because Jesus himself says "I did not come to do my will, but the will of the One who sent (co-missioned) me." The centrifugal movement, from center to margin, from inner to outer, is the heart of discipleship and an antidote to a certain kind of "me and Jesus" spirituality that seeks the quite life and refuses to be socially accountable. But this is bogus spirituality. It is not Christian. Authentic Christian spirituality must have a missionary (or missional) component. And anyone who undertakes to come and follow Jesus must walk his Way, the Way of the Cross. This will always be challenging, a little frightening, and certainly disturbing. But we are encouraged by Jesus himself who reassures us: "Do not be afraid; I have overcome the world."

FROM RATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS TO IMAGINATION AND HOPE

Many people of good will seem paralyzed when it comes to moving forward or responding to the call to discipleship. We are sometime too rational for our own good, and intimidated by the practical questions: "how can I do this" (because I am not intelligent enough, strong enough, young enough, and so on); or "how can I possibly afford this? (financially, time-wise, or socially)." Consequently we may end up doing nothing. The only way forward is to walk with faith and hope, and to employ imagination¹ and creativity. Hope is the future tense of faith: if faith characterizes our attitude today, hope is our attitude tomorrow – but we do not wait until tomorrow: we carry today's faith forward, today, into tomorrow and each tomorrow. As for imagination, a capacity to deal with what has not yet occurred, it is a particular characteristic of the young who are eager to know, to experiment, to try new things. Many people's imagination will atrophy in the course of life, as they become disillusioned, or lazy. Unlike reason, imagination asks open-ended questions with no predetermined answers, questions like "what if?" and "why not?" What if I were to think differently and act differently? "Why not give it a try, invite others, do it differently next time, ask for help?" People who keep asking the "what if?" and "why not?" questions find ways to move forward. They will certainly encounter difficulties and disturbance, but that will never deter them, for they live in hope, "the dream of the waker."

SOME QUOTATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

"The openness of Jesus' discipleship, and of the circles of discipleship around him to the still wider circles of discipleship, was one of the most disturbing and challenging features of his whole ministry" (James J.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*).

"Discipleship is a matter of the imagination, of creatively extending the patterns set in the Jesus movement of the first century, into new times and places. Christology begins in disciples' imaginations. Sometimes our imaginations need to be shaped and formed by our fellow disciples" (Terence Tilley, *The*

Disciples' Jesus).

Anthony J. Gittins, CSSp.

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A much fuller exploration of this, and other pertinent themes, can be found in my A Presence That Disturbs: A Call to Radical Discipleship. Liguori, MO : 2002.

Impression of the Language Groups

What might some superiors general have thought when the invitation in December 2008 announced the theme: "Becoming a disturbing presence in today's world : Christ, through Francis, Clare and... ME!"? Did they find the theme irritating? Was it an unfortunate expression?

The General Assembly of the International Franciscan Conference of the Third Order Regular (IFC-TOR) was organized at "Domus Pacis" at the heart of Assisi, a place blessed by the foot prints of St. Francis and St. Clare. The theme of the Assembly was very much appreciated and it was actual.

The inaugural speech of the Bishop of Assisi, Mons. Sorrentino was very enriching and stimulating.

We have greatly appreciated the morning prayers which were very beautiful and enriching. The Lectio Divina brought us together in silence and listening to the One whose will and work we were trying to discover. It was necessary to place ourselves in the Lord's presence so as to enter deeper into ourselves to find him there.

Fr. Anthony J. Gittins' inspiring and challenging talk based on William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) poem Tintern Abbey was very closely related to the theme of the conference "To become a Disturbing Presence in Today's World: Christ, through Francis, Clare and...Me.

Father Anthony introduced his theme to the assembly in the context of the search for meaning. The new lease on life endowed by the Holy Spirit, the function of imaginative ministry, the *communitas* of true discipleship, and the radical actions of Jesus' ministry are just some ideas explored in the quest for a new understanding of discipleship, following the footsteps of Christ and his servant Francis. Everyone present was moved and thrilled by this Anthony's intervention. And from the beginning a special atmosphere was set. This was not a new, but a true Franciscan sound.

We agreed very soon that the translation from the English – based on the title of Anthony J. Gittins' book: "A Presence that Disturbs" – did not clearly express the real meaning. The talk by the author of the book himself soon cleared up the misunderstanding and we found ourselves at the heart of life's reality: God disturbs, God shakes us up, God challenges us. Br. Anthony did not stop there; if we are called to be part of God's plan, he said, we have to cooperate. We must be prepared to allow ourselves to be disturbed, to put our plans aside and place those in need at the centre (cf. Bartimaeus); not just as a reaction, however, as when some need or challenge blocks our path, but actively: We collaborate with God's plan of salvation when we stand up unbidden for justice, peace and integrity of creation, when we work for the defense of life, especially for every kind of threatened life.

After the introduction and presentations, each group went to its respective meeting room. The meeting in language groups was a very good experience also. In spite of the difference in language, very soon we were able to overcome the language barrier by means of greetings and smiles. The disturbing presence of God was already noticeable during those first moments when some sisters, having the same ideal and the same spirituality, were seeking to create a fraternity in a short lapse of time, in a few days!.

Once the “ice was broken” (because in reality it was quite hot), the moderators began their task of guiding us in the work. Each Session was marked by the joint work of all with the flood of ideas, of comments, of the efforts to understand one another and, finally by sharing in the whole group. The work was always done very conscientiously, even in what seemed to be insignificant or what was more important. We could feel that the Holy Spirit was flying around in those conversations in the group and, that, remained written on paper at the end of the Sessions.

Through the language groups the Assembly tried to reflect, develop and enrich the theme in order to attain the general objective which was to strengthen or intensify the Franciscan commitment for a radical discipleship in the mission of the world of today, as a disturbing presence that leads persons to Christ as Francis and Clare did. In the language groups we have connected this theme comparing it with religious and consecrated life today. This disturbance has to spring from the inspiration of God. It seems that this disturbance, to recognize, identify and truly understand the true challenges of the real world and, in order to be able to face them with effective and appropriate means in the right way, it is necessary to listen.

The meeting in language groups was a very good experience also. The theme proposed allowed us to go back to the sources, to our origin and to be aware of the vitality of the Franciscan spirit. In our reflection regarding Christ, we saw clearly and were enlightened by the link that exists between the theme to be disturbed and disturbing and the notion of servant. In a world of much noise, of violence and of money, Christ and following Him, Francis and Clare, invite us to follow the road of service and not that of power. We also recalled the importance of going back to the Rule and our group thought it was important, to propose a reflection for every day taken from the Rule.

We have to mention that the small Fraternity formed part of a more numerous one which gradually, day by day, was being shaped, in the corridors, during the pauses and at the table shared by all. The following expression resounded frequently: “Every brother/sister is a gift from God”. We felt profoundly the warmth of the Franciscan joy in all our encounters and that, in spite of the obstacle of language. We also wish to see that union among the three orders will become a reality. We all felt that we are active members of this Franciscan family, a branch which has extended much and is always growing in the Church and in the world.

We have tried to use our imagination and to be creative; we have dared to dream of a better world, and that we are those women called to evangelize, to make God’s dream a reality for our world; a just world, a world that accepts the poor, that defends the ill-treated women, that struggles in behalf of the rights of children, that is at the side of the sick.

The meetings in the plenary hall had a www-character: Equipped with head sets, we settled down in the deep, dark, upholstered seats. The translators sat in their cabins above the hall at the back. We also thank all of them for their great translation work. Our moderator Sr. Violet persevered with saintly patience until the last lack of clarity had been resolved and quiet reigned in the hall.

The Leadership Team had prepared the General Assembly with great precision and their report covering the last four years was sincerely applauded.

We would also like to express our thanks for the presence of guest speakers from the Franciscan Family and for their statements or talks. Their contribution intensified the impression we already had of a great, worldwide radiation of Franciscan spirituality through the Third Order Regular Congregations. We are united with one another in prayer.

Assisi showed itself from its best side during this week: we made use of our free afternoon to visit the holy places. The path was bordered by roses; renovated houses and streets, as well as construction sites, recall the strong earthquake that occurred over ten years ago, while the architecture is a source of amazement; longed-for “gelati” delighted the heart.

We congratulate the new Council on their election. Armed with the trust of the delegates and a catalogue of recommendations for the coming four years, we hope that the Sisters and Brothers – supported by our prayer – will serve the Lord “in thanks and with great humility”. We ourselves are invited, as leaders in our communities, to put “spirit and life” into the unanimously accepted final Statement.

In the closing plenary session the general assembly formulated a final statement which contained many of our convictions, feelings, emotions, wishes, ideas and expectations of the days in Assisi. They set us together with our sisters and brothers a prophetic task for the years to come. Indeed this assembly brought us a disturbing challenge.

May God help us to see this urgency, to accept the challenge and to help to make this dream a reality. “And if ...? “Why not...?”

Based on the Impressions and Reflections of the Five Language Working Groups. Drafted by Br. Eduard Quint, cfh; Sr. Regina Pröls; Sr. Paulina Aguirre, fhm; Sr. Jessy Augustine Payyapilly; Srs. Marie Simone Boulanger and Marie Catherine Parrotta, frjh.

The Cantic of Disturbing Presence

Praise be to You, O God,
for the call to contemplation, conversion and authenticity
that leads those who love You
to yield to your Spirit
with hearts that listen, that wait,
that are available to be disturbed,
that are attentive to your call to act
with compassion and courage and hope.

Praise be to You, O God,
for the ‘little ones’ whose disturbing presence
calls into question the warrants for accumulating
all measure of power, privilege and prestige
to which the world attaches such importance
and
which so often comes at the expense the ‘expendible ones’
whom the world despises, discards and makes invisible.

Praise be to You, O God,
for those who commit themselves to living out
the Franciscan Theological Tradition and
exploring its ‘disturbing’ implications for Church and Society -

for through them the People of God throughout the world will know
of your Goodness,
of the Gift of Creation,
of the uniqueness (*haecceitas*) and value of each Creature,
and of the great Mystery of the Incarnation
by which You were moved by Love not sin
to be God-with-Us.

Praise be to You, O God,
for the new, creative and imaginative means of communication
that contribute to our 'being disturbed' and to our 'becoming a disturbing presence',
for the Arts and the artists,
for technology and for technicians,
and for every labor and every laborer making it possible for us
to give greater expression to your Goodness, Truth and Beauty -
so that we may
discover more about You,
proclaim more of your Good News,
protect and care for more of your Creation,
be in relationship with more of our sisters and brothers around the world,
and understand more about their struggles for justice, their longings for peace,
and the pathways they journey to be one-with-You.

Based on the Recordings and Summaries of the Discussion Proceedings of the Seven English Language Working Groups. Drafted by Margaret Eletta Guider, OSF, Synthesizer

Final Statement

IFC-TOR General Assembly
Assisi, 16 – 21 May 2009

The Spirit of God has led us, the sisters and brothers of the Third Order Regular, to Assisi where we have gazed together upon the world as we know and experience it today. We are disturbed by the range of social, economic, ecclesial, technological, political and legal challenges as well as those within our religious congregations. We desire to respond to these challenges in faith, walking with Francis and Clare in the footprints of Jesus.

We are called to become a “disturbing presence” in our world today, as Jesus was in his day.

- We will embrace the call to ongoing conversion in our lives.
- We will respond to the marginalized with compassion; we will raise our voices against injustice, inequality, inequity, intolerance and oppression and help the voiceless find their voice.
- We will cross boundaries and undertake prophetic actions.
- We will choose a non-violent response to violence.

- We will seek creative responses to the new expressions of poverty, illness and violence afflicting our world today.

We are called to become a “disturbing presence” in our world today, as Francis and Clare were in their day.

We will nourish in ourselves and others a life of contemplation in action that acknowledges the primacy of God’s love.

- We will seek new and radical ways of living the Gospel.
- We will promote in our fraternities and within the Franciscan family relationships that en flesh Francis and Clare’s fundamental insight of the interrelatedness of creation.
- We will live our forma vitae in a manner that awakens a new ecclesial and social consciousness and fosters dialogue in the midst of diverse cultures, peoples and religions.
- We will embrace our world, extending our reach beyond our planet to the whole cosmos, caring for it to the best of our ability.
- We will adopt a life-style that disturbs ourselves and others from complacency.
- We will seek and promote what is good and life-giving in our world.
- We will remain faithful to Christ’s Church while being a “disturbing presence” within it.

*Praise to you, O God
for those who, by their disturbing presence,
respond to your call to rebuild our Church and our world.*

Recommendations from the General Assembly for 2009 – 2013

INITIAL AND LIFELONG FORMATION

- Proposal: That the IFC-TOR council and staff continue the Itinerant School of TOR Spirituality, giving priority to countries, regions, and language groups presently without access and opportunities throughout the world. Continue to include education in non-violence, integrity of creation and other relevant topics and incorporate the evangelical life and the Franciscan theological tradition. Encourage the development and use of audiovisual and internet resources.
- Proposal: That the IFC-TOR consider offering international programs for formation personnel and/or brothers and sisters in formation.
- Proposal: Re-engage members in the study of our Rule and Life, beginning with Chapter IX on the “mission”.
- Proposal: Bring newer members to Assembly 2013.
- Proposal: Create, new resources for initial and ongoing formation and publish and make-known existing ones.

COMMUNICATION

Proposal: Create a committee to:

- i. develop strategies for reflection and action at the grass roots level about becoming a “disturbing presence” in our world today;
- ii. promote greater Franciscan visibility, voice and vision in the world and the Church through personal/institutional relationships and the world-wide-web;
- iii. inform and invite members to respond to global emergencies and critical situations.

JPIC (Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation)

Proposal: Identify and give concrete expression to ways that the brothers and sisters can be a “disturbing presence” in facing contemporary challenges and crises.

Proposal: Through word and work promote innovative dialogue in the areas of:

- iv. peace and reconciliation
- v. ecumenism
- vi. diversity of cultures, peoples, religions and denominations
- vii. care of the poor and of the earth

Suggestions:

- Maintain some form of contact with the congregations who have withdrawn their membership. - Have the IFC-TOR inform the members about the pressing needs for pastoral ministers to assist those currently living in these “frontier” communities. - Continue to identify new TOR congregations and invite them to join the IFC-TOR. - Continue to work towards retrieving the original brother-sister relationships among the branches of the Franciscan family.

Closing Liturgy Homily

Fr. Pietro Sorci, OFM

Dearest brothers and sisters, we have reached the end of this intense week spent in the land of Francis, near the place where he departed this life, on the eighth centenary of the Church’s recognition of his vocation and mission as witness of the crucified and risen Christ.

As the theme of your conference underscores, Francis was indeed “a challenging and disturbing presence” for the Church and society of his time.

Eight hundred years later, he still represents a “challenging and disturbing presence” to Christians and non-Christians, for the way in which he embraced Christ, without hesitating or compromising, and for his unwavering trust in mankind, in spite of the often challenging circumstances.

With his humility and simplicity, his total gift of self, his fraternity towards everyone - men and women, big and small, poor and powerful, people of the Church and non-believers - his solidarity with the lepers and the marginalized, his work of reconciliation and peace-building, his reaching out to the followers of Islam, his respect for mother earth and all of creation, he has made visible to the eyes of believers Jesus Christ, the Son of God made flesh, poor and crucified, who died on the Cross for us that we may all become the children of God and his brothers and sisters, and that all things may be made new.

Through his life Francis tells us that we can trust Jesus, we can love him, listen to him, and follow him. His Gospel can be translated into practice, in its entirety, without making compromises or renunciations, by everyone - men and women, big and small, rich and poor, white and coloured - still today.

Here is true joy and true life. This following is sure to rejuvenate the Church, renew the world, bring peace among men and women.

In the Gospel reading we have heard some expressions spoken by Jesus on the eve of his passion, after washing the feet of his disciples and handing over to them in the Eucharist the everlasting memory of his Passover: "A little while and you will no longer see me, and again a little while later and you will see me. You will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy."

Jesus does not refer only to the fact that his disciples shall be deprived of his presence because of his imminent death, which they are soon to witness. He is also referring to the experience of doubt, of darkness and of God's silence that all disciples after them would share - including us. He is referring to the apparent triumph of evil, hatred and violence, of the eclipse of God, which we are currently experiencing, and which is the cause of so much pain and suffering.

But this suffering, like Jesus' passion, is a mysterious source of joy and fecundity. It is not an earthly joy which is bound to the attainment of fleeting values, to placing knowledge at the service of material interests, to the pursuit of a social or scientific career, of fame, economic success, strong and extreme sensations.

In order to express the passage from grief to overabundant joy, Jesus employs the delicate image of a woman who is about to give birth to a child. Her joy is twofold: her suffering is about to end and a new life is about to come into the world.

Likewise, the suffering that comes from our loyalty to Christ and our rendering witness to him begets joy and generates a new world.

Missionary suffering is a privileged place of ecclesial joy, as witnessed by Paul the Apostle who was rejected by the Jews in Corinth and turned to the pagans, many of whom he brought to conversion: not only did many Corinthians ask to be baptized but even Crispus, chief ruler of the synagogue, and his entire family received baptism. In the second letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote "I am overflowing with joy all the more because of all our affliction." (2 Cor 7:4).

Christians who give witness to Christ, spread his word, engage in missionary work, surely go through much tribulation, but are sure to experience great joy.

It is the joy that comes from being his disciples, from knowing that he is always by our side, even when we feel lost and when we sin; from knowing that devoting our life to him and to our brothers and sisters is a fruitful investment and a great honour.

It is the joy that comes from bringing a new life into the world, from giving a fresh meaning and energy to faded and numb lives, from seeing a smile appear on the face of the hopeless. It is the joy of seeing love bloom where there was hatred, forgiveness where there was offence, unity and peace where there was conflict, faith where there was doubt, hope where there was desperation, light where there was

darkness.

The joy of seeing life blossom where there were only ruins. This is the miracle of hope that we, the brothers and sisters of Francis of Assisi, want to promote in his wake, for the glory of God and the salvation of the world.

May the Lord make us instruments of his peace.
Assisi, 21 May 2009

Disturb us, Lord
when we are too well pleased

Disturb us, Lord, when
We are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your majesty;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back
The horizons, of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope and love.

Attributed – Sir Francis Drake - 1577
