

PROPOSITUM



POVERTY and HUMILITY/MINORITY Cornerstones of the Third Order Regular Franciscan Charism

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For information about the periodical, please write to:

secretary@ifc-tor.org

Piazza del Risorgimento,14

00192 Rome, Italy

Tel. +39.06.39723521

Fax: +39.06.39760483

www.ifc-tor.org

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EDITORIAL

Poverty and Humility/Minority Cornerstones of the Third Order Regular Franciscan Charism

by Fr. James Puglisi, SA

The two issues of *Propositum* for 2012 examine the four cornerstones of our Third Order Rule (conversion, contemplation, poverty and humility or minority) from three perspectives: biblical, Franciscan and ecumenical.

In this issue we will consider **poverty and humility or minority**. First from a biblical perspective followed by reflections from Franciscans from other traditions within the Franciscan family and from different ecclesial traditions. It is the hope of the Council of the IFC-TOR that these reflections will give a fresh reading of our TOR tradition as we prepare for the next General Assembly to be held in 2013 whose theme is “Rooted in Christ, On Fire with the Spirit – Go...Transform the World”.

Poverty was recommended by the Second Vatican Council's decree *Perfectae Caritatis* in this way: “religious should painstakingly cultivate such poverty [as exemplified by Christ]” (PC 13). This poverty should be incarnated with diligence and attentively taken care of, be loved with a preferential love and be lived in a growing exercise of expropriation. Ubaldo Terrinoni, ofm cap, begins his article by looking at the reality of poverty from the perspective of Francis as found in the rule Rnb (*Regola non bolata*), XVII recognizing “that all goods are His”. The author then proceeds to develop through biblical themes this intuition of Francis. He does so by developing two themes.

First by considering the biblical witness to “effective and affective poverty”. Attachment to material things

leads to preoccupations while detachment from these allows one to contemplate the only Good which is God himself. The authentic poor accepts not to rest peacefully on the goods of his small world nor on his/her own personal security, but willingly frees him/herself from every ideal thing and above all from self to throw him/herself toward God who is “the All” of his/her life.

The second theme considers the idea presented mainly in the Gospels of divesting oneself (to become poor) so that one may gift one’s self to another. In the Gospel of the Evangelist Luke, the theologian par excellence of poverty, the key word of this theme is not abandonment but gift: the gift of the goods and, above all, the gift of oneself. St Paul picks up this theme in his letter to the Corinthians using Jesus as the example, par excellence, who became poor and a slave to enrich our poverty with his richness (2 Co 8:9). The author ends by looking at the face of poverty today and at what the Franciscan response needs to be today to those who have indeed experienced a “poverty of culture”.

Sr.Tiziana Longhitano, sfp, considers poverty from a Franciscan perspective. The poverty that Francis had taken as spouse bound the person to the person and each one to the Lord. He preferred it more than that which would have caused division. Being bound to the compassionate love, it guaranteed the universal brotherhood that led to the relationship of persons and things, thus leading them to the Lord. This means that for the Franciscan it is a matter of following the example of the Lord. This is what both Francis and Clare only desired to know the Lord intimately and to follow him closely in the transparency of life and in the despoiling of oneself. The Charism of Clare and Francis has in itself from the beginning the elements of a dynamics which tends to radiate the true peace and love which come from God. Poverty is linked to peace and vice-versa. Finally she ends her article with some creative suggestions of

educating for poverty and how best to be Franciscan in the world today.

Fr. Blažej Štrba explains that for the biblical basis of the Franciscan spiritual concept of **minority** it is convenient to take the biblical word **humility** since in the Latin vulgate translation of the Bible *minoritas* does not appear except in its adjective form *minor*, often translated in English as the least (Lk 7:28; 9:48), younger (Gen 19:35), small (Dt 25:14) and so forth. The fact that the Bible has a high esteem for humility makes the commentator's task more difficult, if not impossible, in a short article. The author attempts to limit his research on this theme by looking at key Hebrew and Greek terms in both the Old and New Testaments in an attempt to show the richness of the Biblical concept for Franciscan spirituality. Key words that begin to appear often are kindness and meekness in both the Hebrew and Greek texts. Also we find the humble and the humiliated in both the Old and New Testaments. Finally in conclusion, the author believes that Paul's hymn to Christ in Philippians (Phil 2:6-11) in which Christ emptied himself by the way of self-humiliation unto death and was greatly exalted by God, best illustrates the Biblical proclamation about the coming of God's kingdom and its crucial point and final fulfillment. In this attitude of Christ, we may see how Francis wished his followers to emulate obedience to God as the highest example of humbleness that is sustained only by the incredible promise of God's faithfulness.

Fr. Jogues Abenawe, FMH, then takes a look at the foundation value of minority from a Franciscan perspective. In so doing he uses the themes of the last General Assembly of becoming a disturbing presence. The author believes that the best way to approach the understanding of minority as a value for Franciscan living is through the value of penance. To understand how "minority" as a Franciscan value is "a disturbing presence" in the world today, it is necessary to understand the

historical context behind Francis and his brothers' choice of their identity as "*fratres minores*." The author briefly outlines the history of Assisi before the conversion of Francis, and how they understood and lived "minority." Only then does he move on to summarize how this value is "a disturbing presence" in the world today by giving six ways that we as Franciscans may follow Francis and Clare as they imitate Christ in the world today.

Finally in a very personal account, Sr. Helen Julian, CSF, of the Anglican Community of St. Francis, speaks about the revival of the Franciscan life within the Anglican Communion. Based upon a growing social concern about the plight of the poor and the dispossessed, a movement not concerned simply to help the poor, but to fight the conditions which made them so, came to be. This coupled with the rediscovery of Francis helped by an English translation of Paul Sabatier's influential book in 1894 led to the formation of Franciscan communities within the Anglican Communion. The author continues in explaining how the different Franciscan communities of men and women that came into existence all had poverty and humility as a mark that distinguished them from other religious communities within the Anglican Communion. What linked them all together is the desire to be poor, to help the poor out of their plight and to live a life of simplicity of humility. By giving concrete examples of how these values influenced the fraternities Sr. Helen gives an insight into how our Anglican brothers and sisters are related to other Franciscans today especially around these two foundational charisms.

Pace e Bene.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Puglisi, SA". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

POVERTY

*“Let this **poverty** alone be our portion because it leads to the land of the living (Ps 141:6). Clinging completely to it let us, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, never want anything else under heaven (LR 6: 1-2, 4-6; ER 7:13; Adm 14; Mt 10: 27-29; FLCI 8: 1-2).” TOR Rule, 22.*

THE MESSAGE OF POVERTY TODAY

By Fr. Ubaldo Terrinoni

1. The market of useless things

It is said that the great Greek philosopher Socrates, was seen one day going around window shopping looking in the booths or stalls of the market; one of his disciples remained quite surprised, amazed, he got close to him and asked him how was it that he was there, and he answered that he was discovering, finding out how many things he did not need and could joyfully do without. Socrates' lesson arrives precisely in this endless fair of the useless and the superfluous; it is a valid warning for us who suffer the servile call of the siren of consumption and of waste.

In our socio-cultural context, in which practical materialism dominates and the essential values are darkened, the message of poverty, truly lived, becomes a discourse that goes straight into the heart and renders credible the one who lives it. Never before as today, the cultured and less cultured person, who is encountered on the street, asks from religious above all, the clear and immediate witness of a lived poverty, without looking for comfort and without living by half measure.

Vatican II, in the Conciliar Constitution "Pefectae Caritatis", launched a firm call to consecrated persons: *paupertas a religiosis diligenter escolatur*¹: "Let religious painstakingly cultivate such poverty", that is, let it be incarnated with diligence and attentively taken care of, let it be loved with a preferential love and let it be lived in a growing exercise of expropriation. It recommends to consider with due seriousness the requirements of poverty in our day's work such as availability in work, the care of the goods entrusted to us, the wise use of money and of time... because, as Francis of Assisi teaches, every good belongs to the Lord.

“And we attribute to the Most High and Supreme Lord God all the goods and we recognize that all goods are His and for all we render thanks because all come from Him. And the same Most High and Supreme and only true God may have, and may be rendered to Him and may He receive all honour and adoration, all praise and all blessings, all thanksgiving and all glory, because every good is his and He alone is good”.²

Each one according to their own spiritual sensibility should know how to distinguish between the *necessary, useful and superficial goods*, that is, to know how to be satisfied with that which is really necessary and know how to be wisely detached from that which is only useful or really superfluous. The wise suggestion of life of Saint Francis of Sales corresponds to the point in this regard, that each one can apply to oneself: “I desire very few things and those few things, I desire them very little”.

To choose poverty means to despoil oneself of the goods that one may possess; to opt for insecurity, precariousness, indigence and the last place; to be disarmed in the hands, in the mind and in the heart and always and everywhere appear weak and defenseless in order to share concretely the poverty with those who are truly poor, oppression with the oppressed and marginalization with the marginalized.

2. Effective and affective Poverty

Poverty includes real, concrete, practical detachment from every possession and the detachment of the heart, of the spirit, of the interior world. Therefore, it involves and calls in cause the one who is deprived from earthly goods as well as the one who, even possessing goods and fortune is profoundly convinced that it is not wise to rest the heart on those goods; the goods of the earth will never succeed to fill the spaces of the interior world. The heart is made for God as the restless Qoelet affirms (Qo

3, 11). This is why the true poor is the one for whom God alone suffices, and on the other hand, the rich is the one for whom God does not suffice.

The experience of the Saints shows very clearly that the more one is immersed in earthly goods, the more disillusion is extended in us, because little by little the “things” from the earth reveal unequivocally their incapacity to fill or satisfy our heart. On the contrary, the more one is united with ardent love to the Lord, the more one experiences peace and interior calmness. One gets out of the logic of the things that disturb us to enter, through the threshold of silence, in the experience of abandonment to the only “Good” as Saint Francis teaches in the “*Lodi a Dio Altissimo*”: (“*Praise to God, the Most High*”) “You are the good, the whole good, the supreme good, living and true Lord God”.³

Therefore, the true poor accepts not to rest peacefully on the goods of his small world (material riches, goods of fortune, success) nor on his own personal security (intelligence, will, sentiments, human resources, capacity, talents, etc.), but willingly he frees himself from every ideal thing and above all from self to throw himself toward God, who is “The All” of his life.

In fact, it is not a question of preferring a spiritual possession rather than a material possession; it is a question instead of liberating oneself radically from everything that expires and is empty, illusory, without holding or keeping anything in order to remain open and available solely for the Lord. Poverty of spirit is much more than just a simple virtue: it is an attitude or a religious orientation of the whole person, “it is a certain *quality of life* – as Congar affirms, *that merits no doubt the term of theology*”.⁴

Some modern theologian identifies authentic poverty with “evangelical infancy”⁵ and understands it as a humble and serene renunciation of any attitude of self-

sufficiency. “The opposite of poverty, in this case, is not riches. It is pride, self-sufficiency, the affirmation of the “I”, to close oneself to God and to others. Evidently, in this sense one can be materially poor and not be so spiritually poor because he is proud and arrogant, full of egoism. On the contrary, one can be materially rich and be poor in spirit because is open to God and to others”.⁶ “Poverty of spirit does not exist in the one who says: I want to be my own master and take care of myself. I do not want to depend on anyone, not even on God. I do not need him and I expect nothing from him and I do not allow myself to be commanded by him”.⁷

Therefore, the true poor is certainly also humble, meek of heart, a beggar before God, to the point of having nothing of his own, is capable of receiving everything from the Most High; it is the one who discovers his smallness, insignificance, his own interior emptiness, his radical nothingness as a creature, and thus, with unlimited trust presents himself to God on whom he knows he depends completely for everything and in all and, in spiritual tune or agreement with the People of God in the exile of Babylonia, can truly say: “Now, Lord, we have become the smallest of any other nation, now we are humiliated all over the world” (Dan 3,37). From the discovery of one’s own personal insignificance, springs a sincere and profound sentiment of unconditional trust in God and a great desire to refer to him with one’s whole life.

It was precisely in this way that Saint Francis understood what it was to live the “Most High Poverty”; it is precisely of a poverty that buries its roots in the *l’humus* of humility. He recognizes himself before God and before others as a poor in great need. “This being a question of the “poverty of being” or the minority, - Father Taddeus Matura writes – it seems to me that Francis is profoundly faithful to the Biblical vision. In his simple manner he

repeats the requirements of Jesus to become little, small, humble, like a child, recognizing our infirmity and trustfully placing ourselves in the hands of the One who saves us. His vision of radical poverty of man has the Pauline characteristics".⁸

3. To be poor so as to make a gift of ourselves

The true poor is interiorly free and, for this reason, is always available to live concretely the law of sharing; everything is shared with the one who does not have. What one has, what one knows and what one is, all is shared. Someone has justly written a wise warning: "anyone who opens to the gift is enriched and if he closes himself he is impoverished. God has placed in our heart this wonderful capacity of giving and of giving oneself. The most exciting and most fascinating adventure of man is that of making a gift of his life, an offering.

In fact, a life in order to be true, authentic, has to make a gift of self. It is only in the exercise of a life that has been given, that man attains his full maturity. Vatican II confirms this with a very audacious and at the same time, precious declaration: "Man who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, (*propter seipsam*) cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself"⁹ (*plene seipsum invenire non posse nisi per sincerum sui ipsius donum*)".¹⁰

Concerning the rest, man is essentially a being for others; he is an 'esse ad' (the Latins taught), that is, he is a being who tends toward others, he has the impulse to go to others, he lives for others. The dimension of communion is a given fact inserted by God in the depth of man's being. This is why dynamism and openness towards the other is like an irreversible law to exist, to live, to act, to encounter, to dialogue, to communicate, to serve...

I live, I exist and I fulfill myself in the measure in which and as much as I get out of myself, and I free myself from every fetter or earthly bond and I tend toward neighbor. Therefore, a sure way to follow in order to attain one's fulfillment is not in the exasperated search of self or in the egoistic possession of one's goods, but rather in becoming the other, of losing oneself in the other, in tending to others as a gift. "Anyone who lives only for self does not live for anyone or for self", thus admonishes a famous aphorism. Instead, it is in the experience of the gratuitousness of the gift and in intimate fraternal communion that man finds himself and is fulfilled.

The secret of the gift is love! Thus, *love and gift* constitute an indissoluble binomial; these are two twin terms; not one without the other. Love is the source of the gift, and the gift is the fruit of love. And it is precisely because of this that in the Gospel of the Evangelist Luke the theologian par excellence of poverty, the key word of this theme is not abandonment but gift: the gift of the goods and, above all, the gift of oneself. And thus, abandonment is in view of the gift. It frees us from the suffocating embrace of goods, they take away the traps of egoism and of the hermetic or tight closure so as to allow us to be a gift for all those in need, well convinced of the profound wisdom of the Arabic proverb that says: "The one who gives generously has a radiant face filled with light".

It is proper to the one who loves to give generously and to identify oneself with those who are loved. And this is what Christ Jesus has done in an irreversible way: he fully submerged himself in our human reality; "The Word was made flesh" (Jn 1,14): he became earth, time, history, limitation, conditioning... He completely assumed our human condition in all its complexity and in its poverty. He became our friend, our brother, our

confidant. He became poor and a slave to enrich our poverty with his richness (2 Co 8, 9). Thus, the force of love urged him to the extreme gift of self, to the supreme proof of love: he immolated, sacrificed his life for us (Jn 15,13), he “lost” it in order to give it; his existence was one “of gift”, an existence always given.

In our civilization of profit, in which every relationship is measured with the yard stick of having and of profit, the message of *making oneself a gift out of love* makes an opening. For the rest, experience extensively teaches us that everything is done out of love: we make ourselves poor out of love, we live for love, we work out of love, we serve out of love, we give and give ourselves out of love, “without expecting to receive anything” (Lk 6, 35), without holding or keeping anything and without pretending to receive something in exchange, well convinced that the gesture of giving always receives something in return.

It is said in the way of a proverb that “it is health that gives years to life, but it must be added that “it is love that gives value and meaning to our existence”. It is not the rich or the cultured person or the famous one, and much less a politician to win us over or to fascinate us, but it is the one who detaching himself completely from self and from all goods, makes a gift of all and of self to those in need. He takes care: to offer himself, not “things”, he privileges *being* more than *having*, more than *doing* and more than *power*.

The heart has unsuspected riches which are not sold or bought, but are given. And nobody can think that he is so poor not to have something to give or something to say; because, even in the unavoidable limitations one can be a gift for someone. In last instance, then, the certainty that we can have is that one possesses only that which is given. “What I have spent, I have lost it; what I possess, I will leave to others; what I have given remains mine and with this I will present myself before God”. This is the

warning read on the tomb stone of an ancient Oriental wise man.

In ordinary language, not based nor enforced by the evangelical paradox, principles of this type is what is valid: “One who has more, is more”, “Life is mine and I administer it as I wish”, “without money, you are nobody”, “Only money opens the way for you toward wellbeing and toward complete happiness”. Unfortunately, this is a logic which does not construct man, but deceives him, betrays him and leads him to feel always tremendously more alone and empty because life becomes the idol of itself and nothing more.

In the evangelical perspective, instead, life is only fully found in “losing it” out of love, in donating it, in detaching oneself joyfully from it to make a gift of it. Therefore, in last instance, I find myself before two opposite choices: either to love or to love oneself. Jesus proposes one only paradigm to each one of his disciples: to love, to give, to wear oneself out, to detach oneself, because it is in the oblation or offering of self that the maturity of love is attained, and it is in “losing oneself” for neighbour that one finds the complete identity of self.

4. The map of Poverty today

In every turn of history we come across or we meet “already made phrases”, as magic, sometimes somewhat hermetic. These are easily heard from the man on the street, in the market place, in the office, at home and, then, on the waves of mass-media which invade every sector of the theological and lay culture. In the world of the poor, phrases such as the following are in fashion: “Option for the poor”, “on the side of the poor”, “the cry of the poor”, “starting from the poor”, the message of the poor”....

Unfortunately, on the side of consumer’s society, we know that great poverty crying out in anguish worries so

many countries. Probably, “the exception is represented by riches – as Enzo Bianchi writes – and the condition of poverty constitutes for the majority of humanity a frequent condition, if not habitual: in fact, a good part of it lives not only in poverty, but in absolute misery. And even more today, hunger and misery are increasing in the world in the same measure in which for that exceptional Western minority richness increases”.¹⁰

There is *material poverty* that is suffered by those who cannot succeed to assure themselves of what is essential to live and to face the requirements of daily life. Their nourishment is very much below the limits of what is sufficient”.¹¹ Then there are other expressions of poverty that may be regrouped under the term: “*insecurity*. Perhaps it is precisely insecurity that characterizes better the poor of our time.” “Insecurity is – as De Benedetti writes – what cuts across the situations of those who have a job and the jobless, of those who have no income and those who have it at present. Insecurity, the lack of property for tomorrow is perhaps the clearer Biblical trace or sign in the poverty of our time”.¹²

Then there are also the traditional forms of *solitude and of abandonment* that, unfortunately, today are more diffused and that really they constitute a true “plague” of our society: these are persons who are alone, elderly and sick who need a concrete help, a friendly visit, a word of comfort or consolation so as to be able to continue ahead, having a great urgent need to be listened to in order to share with someone their tragedies of life, the physical and moral sufferings, the mourning, their personal miseries. It is a question of hard and difficult experiences of “non economic poverty” that, as the Holy Father John Paul II affirms in the above mentioned Apostolic Letter, require that new forms of “fantasy of charity”¹³ be found to carry out the proposed charitable interventions.

Solitude and the abandoned have an extension in other “voices”, that correspond to so many *poor who are excluded*: they are the poor who live in the margin of the metropolis, they are the “unsuccessful, the failures”, the sick with AIDS, the drug-addicts, the handicapped, the mentally retarded, the spastic, for whom frequently appropriate structures are lacking, non existing; the retired who have no hope, the prisoners marked by an indelible mark, they are the young who, lacking a family run the risk of entering into a cycle of dependence, of fear and of getting lost.

There is the phenomenon of great concern of the *migrants from outside the European Community*, the great majority of whom live as clandestines. In regard to them a complex organization of help on the part of Volunteers and of Ecclesial and Religious Institutes has been set up. And still, there are many who reject the foreigner, because they consider him as a threat to well-being, as an annoyance or bother to be avoided.

And finally there is the *poverty of those who does not have God*, who intentionally have driven God out or expelled him from their own life. It is the poor people of God. It is a poverty which is little or in fact striking, but certainly very tragic. It is the poverty of a culture which has lost the sense of God and is struggling in darkness of the sense of life, which has diffused in whole masses of persons through mass-media. “It is the poverty of a culture that from secularization is being ship wrecked in nihilism and that, in order to survive tries to create for itself true replacements, operating true and proper mutilations on the faculty of thought and of the love of man”.¹⁴

Fr. Ubaldo Terrinoni

Fr. UBALDO TERRINONI, a Capuchin religious from Viterbo, has a degree in Dogmatic Theology and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Pontifical Biblical Institute. He teaches

classes on the New Testament in the Philosophical-Theological Institute of Viterbo. He was Provincial Minister of the Capuchins of Lazio and President of the Conference of the Capuchin Provincial Superiors of Italy. He is consultant in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. Among some of his publications are the following: *Lineamenti di pedagogia evangelica (Lineaments of Evangelical Pedagogy)* (Borla, Roma 1990), *Messaggi biblici per vivere (Biblical Messages to live)* (Borla, Roma 1991), at the EDB: «Se tuo fratello...» (“If your bother...”) (Mt 18,15). *Sui sentieri evangelici della vita fraterna (On the evangelical paths of fraternal life)* (1995), *Il vangelo dell'incontro (The Gospel of the encounter)*. *Riflessioni su Luca (Reflections on Luke)* (2000), *Parola di Dio e voti religiosi (Word of God and Religious Vows)*. *Icone bibliche (Biblical Icons)* (2005), *C'è l'Aldilà? (Is there a life to come?)* *Indagine biblica sulle ultime realtà dell'uomo (Biblical research on the last realities of man)* (2006). He collaborates with reviews of the Order (Laurentianum e Italia Franciscana) and with scientific national reviews. *Rivista Biblica e Parole di Vita*. (*Biblical Review and Words of Life*)

¹ PC, 13

² Rnb (*Regola non bolata*), XVII, FF (*Fonti Francescane*), 49

³ SAINT FRANCIS, “*Lodi a Dio Altissimo*”, ff. 261

⁴ Y.M. CONGAR, *La povertà come atto di fede, (Poverty as an act of Faith)*” Concilium” 13 (1977) 1 46

⁵ G.GUTIERREZ, *Pobreza, solidaridad y protesta*, CEP, Lima 1971, 37

⁶ L. BOFF, *Testimoni di Dio nel cuore del mondo*, Paoline, Roma 1985, 146

⁷ K. STOCK, *Gesù annuncia le beatitudine*, ADF, Roma, 1989, 31

⁸ T. MATURA, *La povertà nel progetto di vita francescana, “Vita Minorum”* 73 (2002) 96

⁹ GSp (*Gaudium et Spes*), 24

¹⁰ E. BIANCHI, *Povertà e ricchezza nella Bibbia - “Servitium”*. 6 (1972) 277

11 GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Apostolic Letter, ‘Novo millennio ineunte’*, 6 January 2001, Vatican ed., 2001, 50

12 P. DE BENEDETTI, *Povero e povertà nella Bibbia*, “*Humanitas*” 44 (1989) 372

13 GIOVANNI PAOLO II, “*Novo millennio ineuntes*”, 50

14 EDITORIALE, *Chi è il povero oggi in Europa? “Nuova Umanità”* 7 (1985) 6

The Excellence of the most high Poverty

A Reading beginning from TOR Rule

by Sr. Tiziana Longhitano, sfp

Poverty. It is a word that arouses different reactions both in those who pronounce it and in those who hear it. Thoughts overlap and the definitions go from extreme indigence, misery, which one would like to avoid for self and for others, to choices which are new life-styles, proposals of a more modern and sensitive society, to themes of an environmental and social type.

In fact, in the light of strong themes such as those which concern, justice, peace and ecology, poverty assumes a new profile. The preferential option for the poor has been made, Orders and Congregations have directed the destination of their goods to the service of different categories of the poor, the experiences with the least, with the little ones, and the new needs manifested by the people have extended the boundary or limits of the mind and of the heart of consecrated men and women.

Is all this sufficient to say that we are living poverty in the way, in which the Franciscan Charism presents it? Or rather, should the question be: which is the poverty which marks my Franciscan identity, which constitutes me and makes me capable to communicate the Gospel to every creature? The Charism of Francis of Assisi has gone beyond the boundaries or limits of time showing itself to be actual at all times and in every culture; its poverty, its peace, its unmistakably universal love continue to be criteria for a fascinating life for many people. Believers and non-believers alike feel attracted by the style of his relationships. In the expression “without anything of our own”, Francis and Clare have handed to many generations the excellence of the highest poverty which has preserved the *Francis and Clare* Charism young and modern, down to our times.

In this article I wish to re-read the Rule of TOR, re-examine the concept of poverty received from the Franciscan patrimony and offer some proposals that can help to live the vow in a manner of the present time, while remaining faithful to the Charism as well as to our time.

As poor among the poor

To the majority of people the expression 'to be poor' sounds as something which has a very negative meaning, because it recalls several forms of misery toward which nobody feels attracted; on the contrary, these are rejected with all means. However, the scandal of crude poverty and really of hunger, which affects a good part of humanity of our planet, becomes a challenge for those who live squandering or from the superfluous. When there is talk about poverty it is thought, almost exclusively, of the social-economic data or fact, leaving out the more genuine content of the Biblical fact or data which helps one to look at the situation of the poor as that of those who are attentive to a dimension other than that of existence, attentive not only to the possession of goods, but to a higher and more intimate good, to the human heart, more necessary than any other good: the Supreme Good who renders one good.

To live *without anything of our own*, Francis gives this to the friars, and it presupposes a person completely despoiled of the will to possess, of justification, of self-affirmation, or even of those forms of imposition which may lead to the abuse of power or to the domination of things and persons. .

Saint Paul reminds us that the scene of this world passes (1 Co 7, 31) this is why a person who is attentive *to what is lasting*, will be able to sell everything on condition of having the good and taking care of it, ennobling or dignifying every relationship from the simplest to the highest. In fact, poverty, not stressing

things, qualifies relationships. The Rule proposes a strong call to express the most profound sense of minority happily joining it to the style of the poor; that is, it renders the message of Francis and Clare transparent. Both dimensions mutually call one another and are reflected in the whole of Franciscan life: from the exterior attitudes to the more intimate ones. The works and any service offered by Franciscans – men and women – imply minority and vice-versa.

«Father of the poor and poor himself, Francis becoming poor with the poor could not bear without pain or suffering to see someone poorer than himself, not out of pride, but because of intimate compassion»¹. It is evident that what interested Francis was poverty of spirit which united people, that poverty born from the love of compassion which had drawn the Lord to be in the midst of humanity and had made him infinitely small and poor. The poverty that Francis had taken as spouse bound the person to the person and each one to the Lord. He preferred it more than that which would have caused division. Being bound to the compassionate love, it guaranteed the universal brotherhood that led to the relationship of persons and things, thus leading them to the Lord.

Francis was not a dreamer or fool, he knew that the desire of possessing is overcome with love which renders one free from having or owning, from accumulating, from the need of feeling valued, appreciated on account of what one wears or appears, or from the personal capacity to acquire goods. Therefore, he suggests to have few things and to learn from the poor the art of being poor (cf. Rule TOR 21) in order to be free to love the Lord and to be totally dedicated to his service.

Francis does not propose a type of poverty which involves only the personal aspect, he extends this concept to a community form, recognizable even

exteriorly, to visibly witness to the most high poverty which he felt flowed out from the Charism. And even when the friars were obliged to accept houses, convents or Churches, they had to do it with the same attitude of pilgrims or foreigners or strangers.² .

Following the example of the Lord

Today, as true followers of the poor of Assisi, we feel called to reconsider poverty on the incentive or stimulus of the changes which are imposed on us by our time. In the time in which we are living, it is necessary to keep in mind the journey that we have made together with the poor and to look at the future together with them. Following the example of Francis, we have learnt to use mercy, recognizing in the poor the face of the Lord, we have been at the side of each one and we have dialogued with all and we have even learnt many things from the poor. We have learnt to join our voice to theirs when it was a question of recognizing the dignity of the person and of living responsibly for justice, peace, solidarity, and the well-being of our people and of the environment. .

Many brothers and sisters in different parts of the world are responsibly committed to improve the conditions of life of those who seem to be expelled from places of the international economy. They make the experience of sharing in an ordinary way, the poverty of the marginalized, the excluded, the despised brothers and sisters and, the places of discomfort and hardship become places of joy, territories of evangelization, of sharing, spaces in which the encounter between the Lord and suffering humanity is possible, spheres in which God is witnessed *in those having nothing of their own*, in the transparency of life and in the despoiling of oneself.

All this is something passionate, and yet it is not sufficient; together with this type of experience a dynamics of work is necessary which will support the life

of our sisters and brothers who live in the limits between what is liveable and intolerable. It is no longer acceptable that some live alone certain struggles without the support or help of the confreres and of the sisters, that is, of all the other Franciscans. This is the reason why all are asked to make a real commitment to poverty under all aspects, even up to the daily usual choices. For example, many religious, men and women, are not informed about the economic dynamics that support the market, nourished by the expenses that support our life-style. It would be necessary to make conscious, evangelical and critical choices of consumption. It is certain that it is not possible in all parts of the world to follow the same criteria of evaluation or appraisal. To define them it would be necessary to have the updated reference to the social community to which one belongs, because the rules differ in the different geographic environments and in the different cultures.

What really matters, what is important is to follow the example of the Lord, to trust in the Father, the Giver of all good, not to accumulate goods with the pretension or pretext of having *to be self-sufficient*. We are asked for a poverty which is not material misery, but trust in Christ Jesus who “*always suffices in everything and for which he has done for us such great things*”³. To follow the example of the Lord is to trust in the incredible mystery of his poverty which in the Incarnation and in his death he becomes nothing, empties himself, gives himself totally – in obedience to the Father – in order to make us rich in God (Mt 25, 43).

Poor in spirit... do not possess anything

The Charism of Clare and Francis has in itself from the beginning the elements of a dynamics which tends to radiate the true peace and love which come from God. Poverty is linked to peace and vice-versa. The Rule

expresses itself clearly in this direction: no dispute or disagreement when it is a question of goods (cf. Rule TOR 22); the sense of living as pilgrims, as foreigners or strangers is precisely this. In fact, the journey of the pilgrim does not allow one to carry many things, he is nourished by the fruits of the earth and by what he finds along the way; otherwise the journey would not be quick, light. To have few things does not depend on the fact that the goods are not appreciated, that they are scorned, but there is the will to attain a higher goal to which one tends with all one's being.

To be poor, yes, but immersed in a family that has the dimensions of the cosmos and even goes beyond, exceeds it, attaining the Lord, the Creator and almoner. Women, men and things, that is, that we cross in our daily life, including the instruments that we use, constitute the universal/cosmic fraternity. In fact, the whole of creation is a place of encounter with the Lord; creation is inhabited by the presence of the Most High. The ineffable love which Francis nourished for all of God's creatures gave him a way to contemplate in them the Wisdom and the Goodness of the Creator⁴ and, because 'Franciscanism' sees Jesus Christ in the heart of being (Col 1, 15-20; Phil 2, 5-11), today also, we are invited to meet persons and things as brothers and sisters: the neighbour, the colleague, the young, the adult, the friend, and even the enemy..., but also the sun, the moon, the stars and any other creature. Fraternity is the place of the universal encounter.

The Rule of TOR has kept this universal character and, from the heart of fraternity, it desires to reach all and everything. From this centre of communion radiates a certain form of evangelization which becomes witness of poverty, of sharing, of fraternity, of widespread charity which respects the dignity of every being.

For these reasons the Francis-Clare poverty is one chosen freely, not immediate or nourished by injustices or structures of sin; and for this reason it proclaims the dignity of the person and manifests *the high level* of the choice. It is a poverty born from the awareness that everything that the sisters and the brothers are and have, is a gift from *the Most High Lord*; and for this reason it is given back, shared or used respecting the profound being, the first value and its last end. It is not only a question of freeing ourselves from superfluous goods or considered necessary, but rather of inserting everything in a dynamics of reciprocity and of respect, where each thing becomes an *occasion* of communion and of fraternity. But this dynamics needs to have a profound choice, of a life-style that assumes sobriety as a way toward universal fraternity and cannot only be a personal choice but a choice of the community, of the Fraternity, of the Order or of the Congregation.

Sublime by virtue

The concrete facts of Francis of Assisi guaranteed the transparency and the correspondence to what he believed, they were the concrete gestures which indicated the depth of his virtue and led many to the Supreme Being. Acting is important because in each one of us, God wants to love all those who have difficulties, who struggle, through us God wants to reach those who are not well. It is not a question of “doing good”, but of accepting each one for what he/she is, with all their baggage of humanity and of suffering. Action, overcoming the loneliness or solitude of the being surrenders us to our neighbours as a gift, just as we are. We contemplate God and in the events, acts we render him present to humanity, living in a concrete place of the planet, the works inspired to the fraternity, the sharing, the care of creation and the peace, which give hope and

have a universal value. The commitment of Franciscans will contribute to the personal, social and community fulfilment, because it indicates the way toward the Only Good who satisfies the heart. One alone is the Good who entrusts us mutually to one another.

The earth also can be a liveable and visible place of salvation where justice and peace can be realized by the happiness of every woman, of every man and of every child when our commitment of communion will have rendered recognizable their dignity. The other one whoever he/she may be and to what ever people he/she belongs, needs to become himself/herself, to be acknowledged and to acknowledge what he/she is, and not only be judged by what he/she has, by what he/she produces or acquires. The style of poverty which the Francis-Clare Charism proposes fascinates because it gives the possibility of making the world better and more fraternal. For Francis every inhabitant on earth was a candidate for the fraternity.

What can we do to be concrete?

The poverty which we Franciscans - women and men – intend to live is not only an interior attitude. What binds us is something concrete and coordinates the lifestyles, the acquisitions, the daily choices because consumption increases the disparity or inequality among the population and erodes or eats away rapidly the resources of the environment. To be poor does not mean to abandon the goods not being concerned about natural riches; on the contrary, it means to take care of the common good. Today, it happens that on one side the rich consume too many of the resources and on the other side, the poor – urged by the situations of life below the limits of survival – frequently consume in a mistaken way, causing harm to the environment for an added well-being that is scarce or worthless.

I propose some suggestions which express a necessary conversion and the need to rethink about the ways of incarnating the vow of poverty. It is the invitation to join together personal and community ecology to the Francis-Clare Charism.

1. Convinced that the first patrimony of a Congregation are its members, it would be well to think about the future generations, attentive not so much about the quantity of goods which will be left for them, as to the quality of the evangelical values relative to the Charism and to the life-style.
2. Formation should present to all the members, from the youngest to the most elderly, adequate indications for an evangelical, charismatic and critical conscience which would contain an actual contextualization of poverty. In fact, there is the awareness of the requirement of the need for a conscious participation of all the members in the study and choice of criteria which will regulate acquisitions and consumption. The more dialogue there is on this argument the more probable it is that more profitable ways will be discovered and chosen.
3. To form the greater possible number of persons (even if not consecrated, lay) in an evangelical style of sharing and of trust. The lived Gospel – like Francis and Clare have shown us – is salt, light and leaven in every sphere of life and can awaken the necessary creativity necessary to transform the goods, use them again and place them in common.
4. To choose a personal or community action, whether at Congregational level or not, which indicates an economic conversion and evaluate it periodically. With an action one is concretely aware of the situations of poverty, and one takes in hand one's life to transform it, and we are also transformed by our choices and our actions.

5. Constantly inform oneself with the NGO and international Organizations in order to join our efforts in common solutions, and/or introduce in those already available high ethic and evangelical values.
6. Choose to use again things and products created with recycled materials, opt for local food products; abolish the use of bottled water and the use of paper plates and glasses, 'use and throw away'.

Educate and educate oneself to the Francis-Clare poverty

Many sisters and brothers have placed at the service of the Gospel and of suffering humanity their natural gifts and their intelligence and genius. Already a huge work of formation for the diffusion of a critical and alternative culture as Franciscans is being carried forward with courageous freedom in counter tendency as regards the traditional institutional agencies. Through a pastoral work of education efforts are being made to cancel discrimination and inequality. It is important to support initiatives that can save future generations from human degeneration or deterioration. In fact, it is humanity itself which is at stake; our task is to humanize the world through different forms of participation and to renew society by evangelizing it.

The novelty of this time is that the consumer can make his/her own decisions basing them on the information received on the products that he/she buys. Therefore, it is not only the enterprise which is responsible for what it produces and of how it produces it; the common citizen cannot feel exempt from the obligation to use his/her own power of acquisition to make evident the values in which he/she believes or considers useful for the society in which he/she lives.

But who will educate and give to each one the soul, the sense and the prophecy of the choice that

he/she is making? We know that each one of us can send messages to suppliers or providers through the choices that we make in buying products to indicate that one is interested to know not only the physical characteristics of the goods that are bought, but also the way in which those goods have been produced.

We consider that a certain formation in this sector should be given to every member of the Congregation and not exclusively to Bursars, to renew and to arouse co-responsibility. If the webs or nets which generate poverty are not known, it could be difficult to live with transparency the vow that refers to the use of goods.

So many ideas and experiences in the more general economic field have come up in the religious aspect or have been sponsored by various Institutes; these have contributed to the development of whole populations with the common objective to carry out practices in which the Gospel of life, of reciprocal love, of the communion of goods, constitute the heart of any type of exchange. Each one of those, is meritorious, sometimes, even prophetic and heroic.

To conclude, I think that today it would be necessary to make a common commitment to connect the innumerable practices of fraternal solidarity, together we could draw up an evaluation of the experiences, join the responsibility to reflection, implement the research, define models of reference, create a common horizon that as a Francis-Clare family makes us prophets of a style of incarnated poverty which is actual and liveable.

*Sr. Tiziana Longhitano, sfp
Suore Francescane dei Poveri
Largo Berchet, 2
00152 Roma – Italia*

*Professor of Theological and Pastoral Missionary
Anthropology. Study Group 'Custodia del creato' (Care*

of Creation) of the National Office for the social problems and the work in collaboration with the National Service for the cultural project of the Italian Episcopal Conference.

¹ 1 Cel XXVII, 76, FF 453

² Cf. Rnb VII, 9-15, FF 25-26

³ Rnb, FF 63

⁴ Cf. 1 Cel II, 122-13, FF 80

HUMILITY

“Should there be brothers or sisters anywhere who ... cannot observe the rule according to its spirit, it is their right and duty to have recourse to their ministers. The ministers are to receive them with charity and kindness they should make them feel so comfortable that the brothers and sisters can speak and act towards them just as an employer would with a worker. This is how it should be because the ministers are to be servants of all (LR 10: 4-6; FTCl 10:3; TestCl 19).” TOR Rule, 27.

Sparks of Humility in the Biblical Tradition

Biblical Basis for Minority

by Rev. Blažej Štrba

Qui minor est inter omnes vos hic maior est.

For the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest. (Luke 9,48¹)

Leap from minority to humility

In the Latin tradition of the Bible (Vulgate) the word *minoritas* does not appear. However, there are several instances of the adjective *minor* that English versions translate as “the least” (Luke 7:28; 9:48), “the youngest” (Gen 9:24), “younger” (Gen 19:35) or “small” (Dt 25:14) etc., according to the context. The English word and very much the Franciscan concept of *minority* is close to “humility, humbleness”. Indeed, humility includes both the consciousness of being dependent on somebody, ultimately on God, as well as an attitude of lowliness, modesty, inferiority, that liberates a person from selfishness. For the biblical basis of this Franciscan spiritual concept of *minority* it is therefore convenient to take the biblical word *humility*.

This may be easy to say, but it is extremely difficult to convey the biblical meaning of humility. This is an overwhelming task and trying to give a complete treatment of *humility* in the Bible would be an exercise in pride. At least two reasons prevent our doing so. The concept of humbleness is one of the most important ones for the believer and the second, both in the Hebrew as well as in the Greek biblical traditions, there are various terms that describe different nuances of humbleness. Therefore, we do not attempt to give a systematic presentation of each term. We will try on the basis of some key words for biblical humility to present some sparks of humility in the Bible, i.e. *minority* of heart.

High esteem of humility in the Bible

A few examples will show how important humility was in the Bible. Exemplary is the case of Moses, who was “by far the meekest man on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3). The Lord cares for the humble, he gives him to “eat and be satisfied” (Ps 22:27). The penitential Psalm 51 expresses the truly humble attitude of David, who counts on God’s understanding: “God, do not spurn a broken, humbled heart”(Ps 51:19). The afflicted and those in pain are encouraged that the Lord will protect them and that he heartens the lowly (Ps 69:29, 33): “See, you lowly ones, and be glad; you who seek God, take heart!” Among the last proverbs of Solomon is one that compares pride and humbleness: “Man's pride causes his humiliation, but he who is humble of spirit obtains honour” (Prov 29:23). Ben Sira puts humbleness as an opposite to the proud: “A proud man abhors lowliness; so does the rich man abhor the poor” (Sir 13:19).

The reality of humility continues positively in the New Testament too. The first and ultimate example is Jesus, for he is “meek and humble of heart” (Matt 11:29). He will remain humble even when the crowds will applaud him as a king: “Behold, your king comes to you, meek and riding on an ass” (Matt 21:5). Paul gave the Corinthians the example of the humbleness of Christ “I... urge you through the gentleness and clemency of Christ” (2 Cor 10:1). Thus Christian love includes humbleness as one of its essentials. Peter requires that the Christians shall “sanctify Christ as Lord” in their hearts, even in the time of persecution, “with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pt 3:15-16). Indeed the superior thinking about oneself is contrary to the Christian humbleness that is not a Hellenistic kind of virtue of which one can be proud. Christian humility is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that creates clemency and gentleness towards one’s neighbour (Gal

5:23). Thus humility becomes one of the key virtuous attitudes of all Christians.

It is impossible to give a clear-cut presentation of humility in the Bible. There are several terms that are close to the concept of humility. We make a choice here to present one Hebrew key term *'anaw* and three other Greek words *praus* (“meek, gentle” sometimes “poor”), *epieikes* (“kind, clement”) and *tapeinos* (“humble, lowly, poor, weak”) that describe attitudes of humbleness in the Old Testament. We will survey these Greek concepts in the New Testament as well, and try to explain why the term *tapeionos* has received the first place to become an appropriate description of Christian humility.

Concepts of humility in the Hebrew and Greek biblical tradition

In the following table we will present some terms from both Hebrew and Greek biblical texts that render the concept of humility.² One term from the Hebrew Bible has two variations: *'anaw* / *'ani*. Three Greek terms, *epikeikes*, *proutes* and *tapeinosis*, and especially the last two in several cases render well the Hebrew term *'anaw* and the concept of humbleness. Though the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) often renders the Hebrew *'anaw* with the Greek *ptoxos* (“poor”) we will not deal with this word because it would open up another large field of meaning. Let it suffice to keep our attention to these three Greek terms that also appear most frequently in the NT writings and present the Christian humility.

Old Testament		New Testament
Hebrew Bible	Greek Bible / Septuagint	In Greek
–	epieikeia (15x) “kindness, clemency” and its derivatives	epieikeia (7x) “kindness, clemency” and its derivatives
‘anaw (19x) adj. “lowly, meek”, also “humble” ‘ani (75x) adj. “poor”	= praus (16x from all 19 cases) “meek, gentle” = 86x tapeinos „lowly, poor, small, mean, humble“ and its derivatives (of all 270 cases) = ptoxos “poor” 87x (of all 117 cases)	preutes (11x) “meekness, gentleness”; praus (3x Matt; 1x1Pt) “meek, gentle” tapeinos „lowly, poor, small, mean, humble“ and its derivatives

Humbleness in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible ³

The closest term to humility in the Hebrew Bible comes from the root *’nw* I, which means “to answer”. Words with this root indicate both the status of one who has to give an answer and who is in a condition to do so. Such person is therefore in the condition of inferiority towards one who awaits an answer. From this meaning developed another meaning of the root *’nw* II that described the person of inferior status, one who did not have his/her own indispensable property and thus became exposed to exploitation. Thus the root *’nw* II also described the result of lessening and of violence. This second root is used in the Hebrew Bible 79 times as the

verb *'nw* (read *anaw*), more than 40 times as the noun *'oni*⁴, 75 times as the adjective *'ani* and 19 times as the adjective *'anaw*.

The first meaning of the verb *'nw* II is “to be needy,” like sheep without a shepherd (Zech 10:2). The second meaning is much more frequently used in the biblical texts – “to reduce to obedience”, “to humiliate” or even “to violate.” This meaning is evident in the description of Ammon’s humiliating action – a *violation* of his sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:14) or in the Egyptians’ *oppression* of the Israelites (Exod 1:11).

The noun *'oni* describes a situation of restriction, of oppression or of forced dependence. The use of this noun suggests that its meaning includes an appeal that the Lord may intervene (cf. Job 30:16, 27). Such a nuance of pleading petition is characteristic of those who are described as *'anaw* or *'ani*. Though the first is more like “meek, lowly” or “humble” and the second means also “poor”, these adjectives do not describe the social status of those people. They present the fundamental characteristic that they are the Lord’s poor, depending on him and that they trust in his special solicitude. “The *afflicted* (pl. *'ani*) of his people find refuge” in Zion (Isa 14:32) and the Lord “will show mercy on his *afflicted* (pl. *'ani*)” (Isa 49:13). Indeed, the adjective *'ani* “poor” does not describe the economically poor, but is calls for help from the fellow citizens of Israel. The poor, called *'ani*, have the right to be helped and protected. “If you lend money to one of your *poor* neighbours among my people, you shall not act like an extortioner toward him by demanding interest from him” (Exod 22:24). Both the virtuous woman from Proverbs (31:20) and Job keep this commandment of solidarity (Job 29:12-13). On the contrary, the wicked “force the needy off the road; all the *poor* (pl. *'ani*) of the land are driven into hiding” (Job 24:4). Proverbs describes those who “devour the *needy*

(pl. *'ani*) from the earth and the poor from among men” as having teeth like swords and jaws like knives (30:14). Also the tricksters use “wicked trickery, planning crimes: How to ruin the *poor* (*'anawim*) with lies, and the needy when they plead their case” (Isa 32:7).

A closer look at the use of the two adjectives *'ani* and *'anaw* reveals an interesting fact. However, the adjective *'ani* is used more often in the singular form (57x) than in the plural (19x), whereas in the case of *'anaw* there is only one case of the singular (Moses in Num 12:3) and the remaining 18 cases in the plural. The major use of the singular of the first adjective (*'ani*) indicates that the personal case of each poor one was taken very seriously. The plural case of the second term (*'anawim*) is a more spiritualized and epitomized concept; it emphasizes very much the aspect of humbleness and dependence on the Lord alone. A plural form indicates that the biblical texts describe a specific characteristic of this group. Thus a more differentiated use of these synonymic terms clearly affirms that in the biblical tradition on the one hand the humiliation, poverty and oppression of the single person was a challenge that should be eliminated, while on the other hand the positive aspect of those afflicted people – their humbleness and trust in the Lord alone – was elevated on the moral level to the highest status. The biblical tradition does not prefer cultic observance or doctrinal accuracy over or without the inner humble attitude of loving trust in the Lord. The terms we are treating *'ani* and *'anawim*, (though their translations into English vary) express very clearly the faithful and trusting attitude towards the Lord of all those who suffer or are in any kind of need and they do not despair.

Therefore, according to Isaiah 66:1-2, God's future anointed prophet will have as his first role “to bring glad tidings to the *lowly*, (*'anawim*).” The reason was announced earlier when Isaiah spoke about the future

ruler who will “decide aright for the land’s *afflicted* (*‘anawim*)” (Isa 11:4), who are the ones most in need of his help. Because the love of the Lord is more often showed as exemplary for the humble, he adorns the humble first of all with salvation (Ps 149:4). On the other hand, these people are willing to look for the Lord since the attitude of humility disarms the Lord, as the prophet Zephaniah attests: “Seek the LORD, all you *humble* (*‘anawim*) of the earth, who have observed his law; Seek justice, seek *humility* (*‘anawa*); perhaps you may be sheltered on the day of the LORD’S anger” (2:3). Every believing Israelite, praying the Psalms, will know, that the Lord “does not forget the cry of the *afflicted* (*‘anawim*)” (Ps 9:13). Therefore, they are sure of the Lord’s help and they invoke him: “You listen, LORD, to the needs of the *poor* (*‘anawim*); you encourage them and hear their prayers” (10:17).

1. Kindness and meekness

Kindness and meekness in the Old Testament

Though the Greek adjective *epieikes* “kind, clement” is used in the Greek OT and has a positive meaning, it does not belong to the typical characteristics of the good attitude within the biblical tradition. However, there are instances where God is defined as kind: “Lord, you are kind and forgiving” (Ps 86:5; cf. 1 Sam 12:22). The Lord’s power is clement: “you judge with clemency, and with much lenience you govern us” (Wis 12:18).

The second Greek word *praus*, meaning “meek, gentle” has a more positive use in the Greek biblical tradition than the word “kind”. In most of cases it renders the Hebrew “humble” (*‘anaw*, *‘ani*). Therefore the Greek rendering of “meek” in all these cases includes a strong connotation of humility, as if to say that humbleness can be perceived in meekness. The Lord is God especially of those who are marginalized and therefore he cares about

them: “The Lord guides the *meek* rightly, and teaches the *meek* the way” (Ps 25:6). These people become meek, humble and disposed to accept the gift of the land. “But the *meek* will inherit the land and enjoy great peace” (Ps 37:11). In the apocalyptic description of the day of the Lord’s judgment, the *meek* will become the warriors of the Lord (Joel 4:11). Thus the late biblical tradition exalts meekness (*prautes*; translated often as humility too) as an excellent virtue that strengthens the human relationship: “My son, conduct your affairs with *meekness*, and you will be loved more than a giver of gifts” (Sir 3:17; cf. 1:27; 4:8; 10:16, 28). Towards the end of the OT period Moses is praised once more as an example of *meekness* (Sir 45:4).

Kindness and meekness in the New Testament

Both terms meek (*praus*) and kind (*epieikes*) are important for the Christian life. The apostle Paul describes a kind (*epieikes*) person by contrast – he is “not a drunkard, not aggressive, not contentious, not a lover of money.” (1 Ti 3:3) The attitude of kindness (*epieikeia*) “should be known to all”, without distinction whether Christian or not. (Phil 4:5) The Christians avoid quarrelling when they are “considerate (*epieikes*), exercising all graciousness toward everyone.” (Tit 3:2) According to James, kindness is one of characteristics of the “the wisdom from above.” (Jam 3:17)

Meekness and kindness are typical characteristics of Jesus when described in opposition to the political understanding of messianism. Jesus’ action is like the one who is “*meek* (*praus*) and humble of heart” (Matt 11:29). Indeed, he is the king who “comes to you, *meek* and riding on an ass” (21:5). This attitude of Jesus’ meekness will be exemplary for all Christians too (cf. 2 Cor 10:1). Eventually Peter motivates his addressees, stating clearly that beauty is not what is exterior but “rather the hidden character of the heart, expressed in the

imperishable beauty of a *gentle* (*praus*) and calm disposition, which is precious in the sight of God” (1 Pt 3:4). Meekness should be exercised in hard times (1 Pt 3:14-16). Therefore, its end is victorious as Jesus promised – “Blessed are the *meek*, for they will inherit the land” (Matt 5:5).

When the NT exhorts to the virtue of meekness (*prautes*), it does not refer to the free will decision of self humiliation, but rather to a distinctive sign of our redemption by Jesus Christ. Christians should live “with all humility and *gentleness* (*prautes*), with patience,” since it is a sign of their vocation (Eph 4:2). Christian meekness is not a Hellenistic virtue but it is a way of life that recognises that the primary source of meekness is the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:23). Meekness is not merely a human virtue but it is manifested, wherever Christians are in communion with Jesus Christ and are likened to his image by the working of the Holy Spirit.

2. Humbleness in the Greek tradition

The humble and humiliated in the Old Testament

The original meaning of the lexeme *tapeinos* is “to be located in low, to be low”. On the social level it means “poor, powerless”, on the moral level it is “slavish”; from the psychological view point, it is “scared, frightened” and in the Socratic doctrine it meant a “servile attitude” that should be avoided. The negative connotation remains also with the related verb *tapeinofroneo* “to lower, to level, to humiliate, to degrade” or “to discourage” or to “bring to the obedience”. The Greek Bible uses the term with much more positive meaning. In Ps 130:2 the psalmist puts himself in front of the Lord humbly: “I *have stilled my soul*”. Also the noun *tapeinofrwn* “humble-minded” is positively employed in Prov 29:23 “who is *humble* of spirit obtains honor.”

Again a well-known phenomenon appears in the case of use of language in the Hellenistic world and in the biblical word – the same word varies in meaning. In the Greek word, which characterized so much by the anthropocentric vision of humans, the low, humble condition is a shame to be avoided, both from the mind and from the life (action). In the Bible, that has naturally theocentric vision and understanding of humans, the treated group of words illustrates positively the reality because of which the humans are in right and adequate position in front of God and their fellow citizens.

In the Greek OT there are almost 270 words with the root *tapeinos* and 86 of them render the Hebrew root *'nw*. Although in the majority of cases the Greek root is used positively, there are cases with a sharp negative meaning too. The verb *tapeinow* “to humiliate” is used to describe the horrible act of a violation of a neighbor’s wife (Deut 22:24; cf. 1 Sam 12:14). With similar meaning “to humble” this verb describes the act of fasting (Lv 16:29). However, in the great majority of cases our verb is linked to the confession of faith in the Lord. Thus those, who are humble or have been humiliated, are hoping that the Lord will throw down the mighty and lift up the lowly.

The Psalter links the conviction of faith that the Lord will help the humble to constant prayer. “You win justice for the orphaned and oppressed” (10:17-18; cf. 22:22; 25:18; etc.). The trust of the humble to the Lord became almost like a confession of faith. Therefore, in the late period (3rd – 2nd cent. B.C.), in some cases, humbleness became almost equal to wisdom (Prov 11:2; 22:4) or to the fear of the Lord (Prov 15:33; Sir 3:19; 11:1).

The humble and humiliated in the New Testament

There are 34 words from the Greek root *tapeinos* in the NT.⁵ Especially, the occurrences in the Gospels

make clear that humility is an aspect of the entry of the Kingdom of God into the world and related terms are linked to the tradition of the OT in different ways.⁶ When the Mother of Jesus praises the greatness of the Lord, for “he has looked upon his handmaid's *lowliness*” (Luke 1:48), she repeats the words of Hannah from her vow in 1 Sam 1:11. Similarly, “lifted up the *lowly*” (1:52) reflects 1 Sam 2:7. John the Baptist, who put himself in the service of the coming of God, makes clear that “every mountain and hill shall *be made low*” (Luke 3:4). Jesus himself walked the way of *humbleness* (Matt 11:29). Therefore he promises that the one who humbles himself or herself will be lifted up by his heavenly Father. It means, that those are lowly, humble, who do not seek the best positions: “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one *who humbles* himself will be exalted” (Luke 14:11). A similar challenge is required of anyone who is like a pious Pharisee who despises everyone else (18:14). The same challenge appears in the Gospels for a third time (!) when Jesus describes the final judgment of the haughty and the challenge for his disciples (Matt 23:11-12).

The main reason why a Christian should adopt the attitude of “humility” rests in the attitude of Jesus. He commands everyone to “learn from” him for he is “meek and humble of heart” (Matt 11:29). He is humble towards all people and he is humble in heart, i.e., in front of God. In other words, he is totally dependent on his Father and that is why he is able to call to himself all who labor and are burdened (v. 28). Jesus’ teaching is therefore not about ethics of actions as about making oneself lowly and dependent on the Father. His invitation to become like children goes in this direction. It does not mean that one should become smaller than children, rather to conform oneself to children in God’s sight. Thus “whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the

kingdom of heaven” (18:4). This humbleness turns to be beatitude, since it disposes a person to have a share in the kingdom of God (Matt 5:5).

Conclusion

Though much more could be said about humility in the Bible, we decided to end with the example of Christ, as described in the glorious hymn of Phil 2:6-11. In his work, by which he emptied himself by the way of self-humiliation unto death and was greatly exalted by God, all proclamation of the Old Testament about the coming of God’s kingdom came to its crucial point and final fulfillment. Christ’s self-humiliation completed all the Old Testamentary preparation. The Christian life is to be based on the example of Christ, and humility is one of the key attitudes. Christ has marked this humbleness by his extremely shameful death on the cross. This obedience to God may be the highest affirmation of the humbleness that has nothing else to sustain it than the incredible promise of God’s faithfulness. Would this not be an exemplary attitude and basis for Franciscan minority?

Author:

Blažej Štrba,

Banská 28, 976 32 – Badín – SK, www.blazejstrba.eu

Blažej Štrba, born in Nová Baňa in Slovakia (1971), is a catholic priest (1997) incardinated in the Diocese of Banská Bystrica (Slovakia). He achieved his doctorate of Sacred Scripture at the Faculty of Biblical Sciences and Archaeology, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, of the Pontifical University Antonianum in Jerusalem. Since 2006 he has been teaching biblical exegesis in the Theological Faculty of the Comenius University of Bratislava at Badín (Slovakia).

¹ I will use mostly the New American Bible translation or if necessary a more literal translation.

² A fundamental study for this paper was an article by Wolfgang BAUDER – Hans-Helmut ESSER: Umiltà, mansuetudine, *Dizionario dei concetti biblici del Nuovo Testamento*, a cura di L. Coenen – E. Beyreuther – H. Bietenhard, Bologna : EDB, 4. edizione, 1991, 1888-1896.

³ Cf. Ulrich BERGES – Rudolf HOPPE: *Il povero e il ricco nella Bibbia*, Bologna : EDB, 2011, 17-18.

⁴ There are some cases with a different spelling and a slightly different meaning of this noun in Zeph 2:3; Prov 15:33; 18:12; Ps 18:36; 22:25; 45:5; Ezd 9:5.

⁵ 8 times the adjective *tapeinos*; 4 times the noun *tapeinwsis*; 14 times the verb *tapeinow*; once the verb *tapeinophrwn* and 7 times the noun *tapeinophrosuné*.

⁶ Division according to books: Matthew (4x) and Luke (7x); Rom (1x), 2 Cor (4x), Eph (1x), Phil (4x), Col (3x), Jam (4x) and 1 Pt (4x).

Minority: A Disturbing Presence in the World

By Fr. Jogues Abenawe, FMH

Introduction

It is not exactly clear how “minority” came to be associated with the Franciscan charism, but possibly the term is connected with the phrase “*fratres minores*” (Lesser Brothers), an identity by which Francis and his early brothers came to be known. However, the context in which they desired to live their “minority” as “*fratres minores*” was through penance, as has been correctly pointed out by Michael Cusato:

they were viewed by others (and also saw themselves) more simply as Christian men who had chosen to embark upon a life of penance, that is to say, to live as penitents... Christian penitents dedicated to a life lived physically apart from the world and values of Assisi, in remote areas (eremi), in a single-gendered community (fraternitas), traveling about the region preaching penance to all who would lend them a hearing.¹

To understand how “minority” as a Franciscan value is “a disturbing presence” in our world today, one would obviously need to understand the historical context behind Francis and his brothers’ choice of their identity as “*fratres minores*.” I will briefly examine the history of Assisi before the conversion of Francis, and how they understood and lived “minority.” Finally, I will conclude by making a summary of how this value is “a disturbing presence” in our world today.

The City of Assisi before the Conversion of St. Francis

According to Raol Manselli, during the twelfth century there were class struggles for power and control

between the nobles (*the maiores*) and “the people” or *the minores*. Francis must have been aware of such class struggles. When he enlisted himself in the army of Count Gentile in Apulia, he was dreaming of becoming a noble himself. One may not fail to note that such class struggles always led to conflicts to the point of shedding blood. We may recall, here, that Francis was twenty-one years old when the great peace accord was signed in 1203.²

Accordingly, property was always controlled by both the powerful and the wealthy. Usury was common, and such “a mentality in which profit holds a place of first importance, understood especially as accumulation of money”³ made the poor poorer. As Raol reiterates, “we are speaking of the ones who, because of extreme misery, criminality, or horrible diseases (such as leprosy), were excluded, by law or by practice, from civil society.”⁴ It is important to recall that Francis was moved by the plight of the leper that he encountered outside Assisi walls. He wanted his experience to be remembered always: “The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.”⁵

Obviously we cannot go through all the historical details of Assisi during the time of Francis nor is this all that important for the purpose of this article. Nonetheless, given the above situation, one can conclude that what Francis saw in Assisi was not encouraging. Not surprisingly, Francis and his early brothers removed themselves from the social, political, and economic system of Assisi, rejected its values, and sought to have Christ as the corner stone of their community. Clare, too, and her sisters removed themselves from the social

conventions of Assisi and chose the Gospel as their way of life. In her own *Testament*, Clare states: "The Son of God has become for us the Way that our blessed father Francis, His true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example."⁶ They embraced the minorite existence both as a gospel value and as a corrective measure to the Assisian situation. What are the salient features of this minorite life?

Embracing "Minority" as Part of our Franciscan Heritage

Embracing the minorite existence requires that we look critically at the people we consider "lepers" and consider them as belonging to the same family of God's children. This is Francis' experience when he encountered the leper outside the walls of Assisi. Michael Cusato makes this point abundantly clear when he explains:

In that encounter, Francis had his eyes opened onto a whole world of suffering humanity... And in one of those great mysterious moments of the working of God's grace in history, Francis came to a cardinal insight: namely, that all human beings, without exception, are creatures created by the same Creator God; and that, therefore, all human beings without exception, are fratres et sorores one to another, inextricably bound to each other in the same family of the human fraternity established by God himself in the act of creation. As a result, for Francis, everything that ruptures or severs the bonds of this fraternity, anything that divides people against each other, constitutes sin...⁷

Space prohibits a sufficient let alone exhaustive treatment of all the above notions; however, it is easy to recognize that we, too, like Francis are living in a world

where people are categorized into all sorts of classes – black or Caucasian, educated or illiterate, healthy or sick, rich or poor, the list is endless. Quite often the people who do not match our category tend to be forgotten. The minority life challenges us to remove these categories and initiate the process of inclusion of people whom we perceive as different from us.

In addition to what has been said until now, it is also worthwhile to note that Francis encountered a lot of suffering in his own life. There were also many people who were suffering in Assisi during the time of Francis. The war between Assisi and Perugia, the class struggles between *miores* and *minores*, usury, feudalism⁸, horrible diseases such as leprosy, hunger, to mention but a few, caused untold misery to the underprivileged people. When Francis came face to face with the leper outside the walls of Assisi, it was the suffering of the leper that moved him. Raol Manselli explains:

*This was the determinant and characteristic moment of the conversion itself: that of having cared for the lepers with mercy and with loving pity... The determinant factor-indicated as such by the saint-in that encounter was charity... This means that the central importance of Francis' conversion was not the concern for poverty, but, much more humanly profound and valid, for comprehension of the common human suffering of the soul-leprosy of the soul-and body.*⁹

As has been correctly shown above, our life of minority followers of Francis is: (a) to recognize in our midst those who languish in misery and (b) to reach out to them in charity. When one reads *The Acts of the Process of Canonization of Clare of Assisi*, one is moved by Clare's sensitivity to those in misery.¹⁰ Clare knew that if she shared in the suffering of others, she would be

actually sharing in the suffering of Christ as she herself asserts: “If you suffer with Him, you will reign with Him; dying on the cross of tribulation with Him, you will possess heavenly mansions with Him among the splendor of the saints and in the Book of Life your name will be called glorious among the peoples.”¹¹

Another matter that deserves our attention now is the question of the abuse of power which Francis and his early brothers noted in Assisi. The *miores* of Assisi were much more interested in power, accumulation of money, profit, and land more than anything else. Anybody who lacked these elements had neither voice nor status in Assisi. Francis and his early followers did not want to be part of such a social system: they renounced their power despite having been born in powerful families.

For Cusato, the early friars’ renunciation of power manifested itself three ways: (1) their habitations and lands; (2) their subsistence; and (3) their work.¹² He explains that in terms of their habitations and lands, Francis warned his brothers neither to own nor defend their property against anybody who wanted it. Their refusal to own or defend their property indicated that they were renouncing their social status, power, and rights which come by virtue of owning property. Moreover, they were also renouncing all forms of violence just as the Gospel teaches: “But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on [your] right cheek, turn the other one to him as well...”¹³ In reality, through the renunciation of their power, Francis and his early brothers were crossing over to the side of the powerless, the *minores* of Assisi.

Insofar as their life was concerned, Francis and his early brothers disassociated themselves from the use of money. Money could be accepted during extreme cases of sick people. Francis and his early followers were aware of the dangers lurking behind the use of money.¹⁴ In

Assisi, money was a tool used to divide people into classes and to control them.

In regard to the Assisian situation, Cusato explains that “to use money was to legitimate the monetary system, reward its dynamics and close one’s eyes to its deleterious effects on the poor. Solidarity with the poor entailed rejecting that very form of power which proved so harmful to them.”¹⁵ In the same vein, the first generation of friars rejected any job which would bestow upon them forms of power that would oppress the poor in Assisi. Let us state it here without any hesitation that “for the friars to renounce power meant to work and live, like the poor, ‘*minores et subditi omnibus*’ (as minors and subject to all).”¹⁶

What clearly emerges out of the preceding discussion is that embracing “minority” requires that one continually evaluates how one uses one’s resources, and whether such resources empower the powerless in society. It is sufficient to note in passing that “to listen to the poor, we have to move beyond ‘detachment’ from the material possessions we continue to accumulate toward real simplicity of lifestyle and into relationship with those who are impoverished and living on the margins of our societies...”¹⁷

In addition to what has been discussed so far, we must not fail to mention that during his life Francis experienced a lot of violence within and outside Assisi. For example, Dominic Monti claims that in 1198 Francis was part of the rebellion when the common people rebelled against the imperial presence in Assisi and destroyed the Rocca.¹⁸

In 1202, Assisi assembled a militia of which Francis was part and fought against Perugia. Assisi’s militia was crushed and Francis ended up being locked up in jail for one year. We are in dark concerning Francis’ experience in jail, but certainly it is not a nice place where

one would want to be. Monti argues that when Francis “returned to his former work and amusements, they no longer offered the same fulfillment.”¹⁹

Additionally, Francis encountered violence from his own family. One day Bernardone confronted his son violently. Celano recounts that “with no restraint, he pounced on Francis like a wolf on a lamb and, glaring at him fiercely and savagely, he grabbed him ... With no pity, he shut him up for several days in a dark place. Striving to bend Francis’ will to his own, he ... beat him, and bound him.”²⁰ We also need to recall the violent confrontation between Francis and his father and how he stripped himself before the Bishop of Assisi²¹.

Despite the violence Francis encountered, he chose to be an ambassador of peace. To do penance meant for him to preach and live the gospel by announcing peace, a mission which he embraced shortly after his conversion.²² Indeed, our life as Franciscans is incomplete unless we, too, consciously choose to renounce violence in all its forms and become ambassadors of peace.

The Value of “Minority” is a Disturbing Presence in our World Today

In view of the preceding discussion, the value of minority is a disturbing presence in our world today. First, to be followers of Francis means that we renounce power and control that would trample the rights of those who have no voice in our society today. That is not an easy thing to do because having power and control over others is seemingly attractive.

Second, living as “minors” consists in the comprehension of human suffering both physical and spiritual. Dealing with any individual who is suffering is always a work of grace: it is one of the most difficult tasks that can be entrusted to anybody. Reaching out to those

who are physically and spiritually suffering can be a big challenge.

Third, living the value of “minority” requires that we share the good things of creation bestowed upon us by our loving Creator – these good things of creation include our money and property. As human beings, appropriation is much easier than disappropriation. Rather than accumulate things, Francis chose to share them with those he perceived as less fortunate.

Fourth, the value of “minority” challenges us to practice charity by including in our circle those that we perceive as “lepers.” We are invited to begin to see each other as brothers and sisters belonging to God’s family. This is not easy for we have been socialized to believe that we are different from one another because of color, religion, education, race, tribe, status, to mention but a few.

Fifth, those who wish to live “minority” must begin the process of disassociating themselves from society’s values that do not conform to the values of the Gospel. Jesus was always at logger heads with individuals and groups whose values were out of touch with the Kingdom of God.²³ Francis and his early brothers and sisters, such as Clare, rejected the values of Assisi and followed the Gospel values.

Sixth, we become a disturbing presence in our world today when we become peace makers by consciously choosing to face “the wolves of Gubbio.” The minorite existence challenges us to renounce violence in all its forms and become ambassadors of peace. It is outside the scope of this article to bring out a detailed picture regarding forms of violence both at a personal and communal level, yet if this subject is studied at length, one will be surprised at how violent we can be to others.

Fr. Jogues Abenawe, FMH,
Congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of Hope
(The Lyke Community), P.O. Box 15319-00509,

NAIROBI-KENYA, EAST AFRICA -
jodavias@yahoo.com

Administrative Assistant and Lecturer at SAPIA (St. Anthony of Padua Institute of Africa), Rector for Franciscan Missionaries of Hope for students of philosophy and theology. BSc Degree in Education (St. Mary's University, Winona, Minnesota), MDiv (Notre Dame Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana), MA in Franciscan Studies (St. Bonaventure University, New York).

List of Abbreviations Used - Franciscan Sources

- IC *The Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano
- 2Lag The Second Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague (1235)
- FA:ED Armstrong, J. Regis, O.F.M. Cap., Wayne, J. A. Hellmann, O.F.M. Conv., and William, J. Short, O.F.M. eds. *Francis of Assisi: The Founder. Early Documents I*. New York: New City Press, 2000.
- Test *The Testament of Francis*
- TestCl The Testament of Clare (1247-1253). This Testament is found in Armstrong, J. Regis, et al. *The Lady: Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*. New York: New City Press, 2006.
- PC The Acts of the Process of Canonization of Saint Clare (1253)

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¹ Michael F. Cusato, "To Do Penance/*Facere poenitentiam*: Franciscan Identity and Ecclesial Identity," in *The Early Franciscan Movement (1205-1239): History, Sources and Hermeneutics* (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2009), 50.

² Raol Manselli, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 22.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵ Test, 1-3 in FA:ED 1, 124.

⁶ TestCl 5.

⁷ Michael F. Cusato, "To Do Penance/*Facere poenitentiam*: Franciscan Identity and Ecclesial Identity," in *The Early Franciscan Movement (1205-*

1239): *History, Sources and Hermeneutics* (Spoleto: *Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, 2009), 37.

⁸ Feudalism was a system during the Middle Ages whereby the poor worked, fought for nobles, and lived on their land in return for protection. In short, the nobles were “riding on the backs” of the poor and enriching themselves.

⁹ Raol Manselli, *St. Francis of Assisi* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988), 36.

¹⁰ PC 1:16; 2:13, 15, 16, 18; 3:10, 15, 16, 17; 4:7., 8, 9, 10, 11; 7:12.

¹¹ 2Lag 21-22.

¹² Michael F. Cusato, “To Do Penance/Facere poenitentiam: Franciscan Identity and Ecclesial Identity,” in *The Early Franciscan Movement (1205-1239): History, Sources and Hermeneutics* (Spoleto: *Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, 2009), 32.

¹³ Mt 5: 39- 41 NAB.

¹⁴ When Saint Paul wrote to Timothy, he exhorted him to refrain from false wealth that comes from illegal material gain. Read 1Tm 6:10.

¹⁵ Michael F. Cusato, “To Do Penance/Facere poenitentiam: Franciscan Identity and Ecclesial Identity,” in *The Early Franciscan Movement (1205-1239): History, Sources and Hermeneutics* (Spoleto: *Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, 2009), 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁷ Marie Dennis, “The Cry of the Poor: Are We Listening,” in *Poverty and Prosperity: Franciscans and the Use of Money*. Washington Theological Union Symposium Papers 2009, Daria Mitchell, ed. (New York: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 2009), 5.

¹⁸ Dominic Monti, *Francis and His Brothers: A Popular History of the Franciscan Friars* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2009), 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰ 1C 12 in FA:ED 1, 191-192.

²¹ 1C 13-15 in FA:ED 1, 192-194.

²² 1C 23 in FA:ED 1, 202.

²³ Examples of such people include: Mt 9:1-7; Mt 12:1-8; Mt 19: 1-12.

Minority and poverty: an Anglican perspective

By Sr. Helen Julian, CSF

Recently I heard a new story from our longest serving sister. She joined my community, the Community of St Francis, in 1955, the year I was born. We had only one house, in east London. On Elizabeth's first visit she made her way to the front door past a sister who was scrubbing the steps. She was taken to the parlour, where she rather nervously announced that she was there to see the Mother Superior. 'Oh, you've met her', said the sister who had shown her in, 'she's the one scrubbing the steps outside.' Elizabeth concluded, 'I knew I'd found the right community.'

It's a vivid picture of minority, though the word itself would I'm sure have been strange to the sisters. It doesn't appear in our first Rule, based heavily on the Rule of St Clare (though we were never enclosed). And neither does it feature in the *Principles* which replaced that rule in the 1960s.

Franciscan life revived

The revival of the Franciscan life in the Anglican church came fairly late in the recovery of the religious life; the first communities began in the 1840s, but the first Franciscan inspired ones not until the 1890s. My own community, now the oldest surviving Anglican Franciscan community, was founded in 1905.

This was a time of growing social concern about the plight of the poor and the dispossessed. Christian Socialism began, a movement not concerned simply to help the poor, but to fight the conditions which made them so. Along with this came a 'rediscovery' of Francis; the first modern English biography came out in 1870, and the English translation of Paul Sabatier's influential book in

1894. And it was out of this background that Anglican Christians began to find inspiration in Francis of Assisi.

James Adderley was one of the pioneers; ordained in 1887, he founded in 1894 the Society of the Divine Compassion (SDC), specifically to live among and work with the working poor. Although Adderley himself left SDC in 1897 the community continued its work. One member joined a march of the unemployed, mainly dockers, in 1906, and this was characteristic of SDC's concern for the dignity of labour. Life in their house in Balaam Street, Plaistow, was very simple. In 1917 a single gas radiator was installed, to warm the house in very cold or damp weather. Although SDC itself came to an end in 1952, the brothers of the Society of St Francis took over the house and the ethos, and still work there today, in what is still a very poor area of East London.

Foundation of the Community of St Francis

Our own founder was already a sister in a community which specialised in providing retreats. Although she was well educated she had joined as a lay sister, perhaps because of the lack of a dowry, or through humility. They lived in the east end of London, and through visiting in the parish she became increasingly aware of the poverty all around. Eventually, unable to bear being so much better off than those around her, and influenced by John Hawes, the curate at the local church, she left that community to begin a new one which would live in Franciscan poverty.

Initially they lived in Hull, on the east coast of England, in a poor area. They took in washing to pay their rent, and cared for the children of working mothers. In 1908 they moved back to London, and soon after, with numbers growing, moved into a dilapidated house; so dilapidated that the Council had condemned it. It became their home for 53 years. The sisters continued to take in

laundry to earn their living, and lived a strict life of poverty, prayer and service. Soon after the first World War the house next door was given to them too, and they began the work of caring for incurable women which continued until the 1970s. There was no money to furnish the house, but they heard of a military hospital being closed down and wrote to ask whether they could have some of the furniture. One of the sisters wrote 'it rained bedsteads, mattresses, blankets, lockers – in fact everything one could want' – and this trust in God's provision was a constant feature of their life. Much much later, some sisters found themselves once again living in a house which had been condemned as unfit for habitation, in Belfast in the early 1990s.

Early Franciscan communities

Poverty was a very important element in the foundation of the first Anglican Franciscan communities; a poverty based on real knowledge of the poor, not romantic notions. Several evolved from small groups engaged in living alongside and seeking to help the poor, rather than with the intention of founding a religious community as such.

One of the early communities, inspired by Francis and Franciscan values rather than specifically Franciscan as yet, began in 1922 in Poona, India. The Christa Seva Sangha (CSS) sought to live a simple life in an Indian style among Indians, rather than to import an English life. The *Principles* were first written for this small group. That context makes some of their contents even more striking; this was the height of Empire, but here were Englishmen seeing themselves as no better than others, and doing their own work, including manual work. Their members were living among those of other faiths at a time when this was rare, and being challenged by what they saw of devotion and care in these others.

One of the early members of CSS, Algy Robertson, returned to England in 1930 because of poor health, and set up an English branch of the community. This evolved into the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ.

The Brotherhood of St Francis of Assisi, founded around the same time, held the same attitudes. Their particular work was with wayfarers – the homeless men who wandered the roads, finding some very basic help in the ‘casual wards’ which offered two night’s lodging, with a day’s hard work in between. The early members went to these places on the same terms as the wayfarers. Their first and provisional rule, in 1927, said that the community consisted of religious brothers and wayfarers – a very radical move for the time. And their final rule of the early 1930s said that they were to have no endowments, land or buildings, and to keep only six month’s money in the bank. ‘We would be dependent upon God for our daily bread and be prepared if need be to end our lives in the Workhouse’.¹ Our own Constitution still says that ‘Households should not normally accumulate more than is necessary for six months’ maintenance.’²

The Order of St Elizabeth of Hungary, a women’s community recognized by the church in 1916, also gave a high value to poverty. They had no invested funds, accepted no payment for the work they did, and kept only enough money in the bank for one month’s expenses. Whatever they had over and above this they gave away.

Following Christ in poverty

For each of these communities, and others, the desire to follow Christ in poverty was very strong, and led naturally to a concern for those who had no choice about living in poverty. The BFSAs described poverty as their method for winning souls to Christ.

‘Because we wish to share the poverty of Christ, we desire to divest ourselves of all but the simplest of requirements of life, to move amongst people living by compulsion a life of poverty, and to illustrate to them by deed as well as by word, the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.’³

Another of the early groups, the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, was founded in the late 1920s in south London by George Potter, who wrote, ‘It is that dirty towel of humble service – just as we should have found it in the Upper Room – which we have made our symbol of service.’⁴

In the 1930s conversations took place between several of the small men’s communities, and in 1937 the Brotherhood of St Francis of Assisi and the Brotherhood of the Love of Christ merged to become the Society of St Francis (SSF), which has become since the ‘umbrella’ which includes the vast majority of Anglican Franciscan religious, both men and women, in first, second and third orders. The *Principles* which had been written for CSS in India were rewritten for their new context to become the spiritual founding document of this new community, and have continued to be hugely influential ever since. In this it echoes the TOR Rule, which is described as ‘a spiritual document containing values, attitudes and principles necessary for a way of life’.⁵

SSF and CSF had a growing relationship, and became formally affiliated to another in 1964, when CSF took on the *Principles* as their Rule, finding expressed in them the spirit of the life which they were already living.

Minority in the *Principles*

Although ‘minority’ as a word doesn’t feature in the *Principles*, the value and attitude is present throughout. They begin by quoting Jesus’ words about the grain of wheat which must fall to the ground and die (John 12:24 –

26) in order to bear fruit. In this spirit, 'The object ... of the First Order, is to build up a body of men and women, who accepting Christ as their Lord and Master, will seek to follow him in the way of renunciation and sacrifice as an act of witness and for the loving service of his brothers and sisters in the world.'⁶

However despite this high calling, 'they must resist the temptation to consider themselves superior to others because dedicated to a life of religion, realising how much greater often are the sacrifices and difficulties of those engaged in the ordinary professions of life and how much more nobly they face them.'⁷

Celibacy is not to be seen as a superior state either, but simply as a response to God's call to each individual. 'They do this [embrace the vocation of celibacy] not because they believe that the unmarried state is in itself higher than the married, but because they believe that for them the unmarried state is that in which God wishes them to serve him.'⁸

The Ministers are servants 'like the other members, under obedience to the Rule and Chapter, and are bound to exercise their authority, not in a spirit of partiality or pride or selfishness, but with equal consideration and love and with humble prayer for the divine wisdom.'⁹

In this they follow 'Jesus the Master [who] took on the form of a servant'.¹⁰ And the work of a servant is where the ministry of sisters and brothers is to begin. 'The active works by which the brothers and sisters seek to serve their Master begin within the house and garden. The sweeping, dusting and other menial offices, as well as certain forms of manual work, are apportioned among them ...'¹¹

This has continued to be an important principle of our lives, and we have historically been uncomfortable living a life which we can't in large part sustain through

our own work. Poverty has also been a factor in this practice, as we have often been unable on any long term basis to afford to employ others to do the practical work of our households, but there has also been a feeling that it is not congruent with our life. We have either looked for others to come and live with us, sharing the community life and work, or we have simplified the work so that it can be done by us, if necessary moving to smaller houses.

Our brothers at the foundation house of Hilfield in Dorset, while still professed members of SSF, are also part of the Hilfield Community – a mixed group of men and women (and two children), with varying lengths of commitment, but all with a say in the daily running of the house. The local chapter now consists of equal numbers of brothers and other community members. They have become a minority in their own house, giving up the power to dictate how it is run; another way of living minority.

Another sign of minority is that of not founding our own institutions but rather joining in the work of others. In the *Principles* 'The community does not indeed expect ever to have at its disposal many funds for the administration of charitable relief, but it will gladly lend its members in the work of such relief and co-operate with others who are doing it.'¹² Working in other's organisations means we don't have the power we would have if they were ours.

Poverty in the *Principles*

Poverty is far more clearly present in our *Principles*, as both value and practice. The key motivation for embracing poverty is of course that of following Jesus, seeing him as 'a wayfarer, with nowhere to lay his head'.¹³ But there is also realism; we seek 'to be in love with poverty' and 'to covet only the

unsearchable riches of Christ', but 'recognise ... that while some of [our] members may be called to a literal following of St Francis in a life of actual penury and extreme simplicity, for most so high an ideal will not be possible.'¹⁴

There is also a recognition of the risks of paying lip service to poverty, of owning nothing personally but living at ease in a rich community. 'It would be small gain were they to surrender their personal possessions only to live in luxury through the abundance of the common stock.'¹⁵ But there is an awareness also of the risks at the other end of the spectrum; our chosen poverty is not to become destructive. 'The buildings it [the community] erects and the style and manner of life which it permits must be the simplest that are consistent with good health and efficient work.'¹⁶

How does all this work out in practice today? I offer a few snapshots.

Snapshots of minority and poverty in practice

One way in which our brothers demonstrated their commitment to minority was to abolish the distinction between lay and ordained brothers in the late 1960s. In the beginning certain roles were reserved to the ordained, but from this point everyone was called 'brother' and all roles, up to and including Minister Provincial, were open to all. When in the 1990s it became possible for sisters to be ordained as priests, we in CSF kept to the same principle.

We also share in the general Anglican experience of being, as religious, rather marginal to the church. Many Anglicans do not even know that their church has religious orders, and some who do know disapprove, or see us as irrelevant. Becoming a sister or brother does

not bring automatic status or power, and this has always been the case.

CSF now has sisters in South Korea; they began as a separate community, came into covenant with us, and then joined CSF in 2008. They are at present only two, a very small community within a very small church. They live in rented flats, and have already moved four times in about ten years. Flats in Korea are small, and so it is hard for them to welcome new members. They plan to build their own convent, and have been offered some land; now they face the enormous task of raising funds to build it. They are both already working simply to support themselves; but they are cheerful and committed and confident that they will find a way. They are a good reminder to the rest of us of the power of the Franciscan ideal, and the graces of the early days of community life.

My final snapshot is from those earlier days; it's a story of poverty, of a poverty which we rarely experience today. But it's also a story of the practical skills of 'living poor'; not a romantic dream but a daily exercise in ingenuity. And I like to think that our sister experienced some satisfaction from her transactions too!

Sr Lilian Agnes, who made her life profession in 1917, and died in 1968, wrote:

'One penny in the purse and no food in the garden! I was told to go the butcher and buy a pennyworth of bones, in those days more meaty than would be the case nowadays. The cook first cut and scraped off every scrap of meat, added a potato or two, some pearl barley and left-overs of vegetables, and produced stew for dinner. Then the bones were simmered a long time with a few peapods, to produce soup for sisters and patients. The bones were then given to the dog, who being old did not

scrunch them up much. I watched, and when Benjy had really done, gathered up the bones, took them down the road and sold them to the rag-and-bone man for sixpence.’

Sr. Helen Julian CSF was born and brought up in Scotland, and trained as a librarian before joining the Community of St Francis in 1985. She has served the community as Novice Guardian, and, since 2002, as Minister Provincial of the European Province. She has written three books, and is a regular contributor to the Bible Reading Fellowship’s bible study notes, New Daylight.

¹ BSFA Rule and Constitution, in *Walking in the Footsteps of Christ: the historical documents of the Society of St Francis*, SSF, 2003, for private circulation

² Society of St Francis, *The Constitution of the First Order*, 2002

³ BSFA Rule and Constitution, in *Walking in the Footsteps of Christ: the historical documents of the Society of St Francis*, SSF, 2003, for private circulation

⁴ Barrie Williams, *The Franciscan Revival in the Anglican Communion*, DLT, 1982, p. 113

⁵ *The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St Francis and Commentary*, Franciscan Federation, 1996, p. 35

⁶ *The Principles of the First Order* SSF, SSF, 1996, day 2

⁷ *ibid*, day 26

⁸ *ibid*, day 8

⁹ *ibid*, day 11

¹⁰ *ibid*, day 20

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² *ibid*, day 21

¹³ *ibid*, day 5

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *ibid* day 6

¹⁶ *ibid*