

# PROPOSITUM



## **The Young Generation: Hope for the Future of the Religious Life-TOR VOWS and Foundational VALUES**

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# EDITORIAL

## HOPE FOR THE COMING GENERATION Becoming a Sign of God's Presence in the World

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

With this first number of *Propositum* for 2013 we bring to a close a whole cycle of explorations that grew out of the recommendations of the last General Assembly of the IFC-TOR, namely to explore new ways of incarnating the values of the TOR Rule in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since 2009 when we have explored the meaning of the evangelical counsels by considering them in their Biblical, Franciscan and anthropological/cultural contexts with the view toward not only a deeper understanding of their meaning but a fresh way of their being lived.

In this issue, the IFC council has invited younger Franciscans who are starting out their lives as TOR Franciscans to reflect on two basic questions. The first of these was intended to get access to the thinking of these younger Franciscans concerning how we can live our evangelical vows in a meaningful and challenging way in today's world. The purpose was not only to have an insight into how young people see the consecrated life but also why would they opt for this way of living over some other attractive life style. Ancillary to this the answers give us an insight into the issue of inviting others to consider religious life.

The second question attempts to gather information on the priority of values that younger Franciscans have in the living of religious life. We asked them to reflect on what they think should be given priority in following Christ as a Franciscan in a meaningful and relevant way as we practice the fundamental values of our TOR Rule: conversion, contemplation, minority, and poverty.

The Church recognizes that it is necessary to be able to speak to the world in which we live. This means that we have to develop a language that is understandable by that world. In a certain way the Church looks to religious women and men to be at the vanguard, prophetically breaking new ground with the unchanging Gospel of love and truth. Clare and Francis broke new ground by refusing to live the monastic life style being imposed by the tradition of the Church. Instead they heard deeply the evangelical message of Christ in the way Christ lived as a witness to this love, to this truth of an eternally merciful, loving God. Simplicity, authenticity, penance, fraternal love were the words that they spoke to their world in imitation of Christ.

The reader will be moved by the witness given by the younger Franciscans that responded to our call to share their reflections on these two questions. As Franciscans we are called to constantly re-translate the Gospel in accessible language that will challenge both speaker and hearer. This is how the Holy Spirit continues to make new all things! This is the hope for generations of youth who have lost faith in the Church, in religion and maybe even in God. Our times are not that unlike those of Francis and Clare! We are bombarded by a quantity of information that we are not physically capable of absorbing let alone interpreting. The answer is not to shut down but rather to go deeper. In the inner being there is the "still point" which is the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit. They continue to dance the dance of love in a movement that makes them one. Francis and Clare sought to imitate this is their relationship to one another and to the world in which they lived. The world became their cloister. Human warmth and relationship in a cold impersonal world became their language, rather their song!

The IFC council hopes that your reading and reflecting on the responses of these younger Franciscans will give you and your Fraternities the hope that is needed to renew your own sisters and brothers to become that presence of God in today's world.

We wish to express our deep appreciation first to all of the members of the formation Fraternities that participated in this project; to Sister Martin Flavin, OSF of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity for the collation and redaction of the responses; to Dr. Loredana Nepi for the commentary on the icon of Francis and lastly to Sr. Margherita, the Secretary of the IFC-TOR council.

Epiphany 2013

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James F. Puglisi, SA". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'J'.

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



**FRANCISCUS GLORIOSUS**  
**The lunette of the *Glory of St. Francis* in the Lower  
Basilica in Assisi**

*Dott.sa Loredana Nepi*

Assisi, Lower Basilica of Saint Francis, crossed vault,  
*Maestro delle Vele*, *Glory of St. Francis*, 1315-1320 ca.

The *Glory of St. Francis*, painted between the Allegories of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, is the focal point of the iconographic program developed for the cross vaulting of the Lower Basilica of Assisi.

The hypotheses on the authenticity of these frescoes have been pointed towards a person of the school of Giotto who has remained unidentified, the so-called *Maestro delle Vele*.<sup>1</sup> The assumptions of dating indicate a time span large enough not to allow the benefactor to be determined exactly, but the latest date accepted being September 29, 1319, the date of the Ghibelline uprising led by Muzio di Francesco that caused the interruption of the artistic activities in the Basilica for several years <sup>2</sup>.

The panel of the *Glory of St. Francis* is completely centered on the figure of Francis, presented as young and beardless, seated on a throne under a canopy and surrounded by jubilant Angels. The inscription in Gothic characters placed above the canopy defines him as *Glorios[us] Francisc[us]*. The top of the panel is occupied by a seraph painted above a red banner marked with a cross and seven stars. The saint wears a golden dalmatic, whose fine fabric is minutely described. In his hands, of which there are evident signs of the stigmata, he is holding a book and a cross. His head is surrounded by a golden halo and all its hieratic figure emanates rays of light.



The scene is totally lacking in a spatial definition and is presented as a pure eschatological vision, unlike the Allegories of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, that are framed within physical spaces (the rocky and barren hill, the turreted castle, the chapter room). The physical spaces suggest the earthly dimension of the ascetic path bound to the observance of the vows<sup>3</sup>. In addition, while in the lunettes of the Allegories, the message is articulated through complex allegorical images, the glory of the saint is expressed with an iconic language, easily understood in its fundamental meaning. In the light of this communicative clarity and its visible position from the nave, the *Glory of St. Francis* may also be considered, on a first level of interpretation, as the visual and conceptual culmination of the narrative cycle that runs along the walls of the nave and transept, a catechesis of images on the life of Francis elaborated for the benefit of pilgrims: the image of the saint transfigured in heavenly glory is offered for the pilgrim's veneration<sup>4</sup>.

The lunette of the *Glory* is not limited to confirm the story of a life of holiness. Being an integral part of the iconographic program of the transept, its message is clearly directed to the friars, privileged users of the area destined for liturgical use. The initial interpretation of the fresco is given by the inscription of the arch, in which Francis is defined as one who has renewed evangelical life, which prepares the way of salvation and that, adorned with the virtues of poverty, chastity and obedience, rises with the angelic hosts to heaven with Christ where he will reign<sup>5</sup>.

The text of the inscription has strong similarities with the *Prologue* of the *Legenda maior* of Bonaventure, who, for his language full of visual suggestions, seems to have provided sources of inspiration for the lunette of the *Glory*.

The utilization of the gold and the rays that radiate from the entire figure of the saint reminds us of the bright vision of Francis which opens the *Prologue*: “God [...] gave him as a light for believers [...] that by bearing witness to the light, he might prepare for the Lord a way of light”, “shining with the splendor of his life and teaching, like the morning star, [...] by his resplendent rays he guided into the light those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death”<sup>6</sup>. The gold color indicates the symbolic value of the dalmatic worn by Francis: the *vestis coelestis* which refers to a condition no longer earthly, but glorified, all the more meaningful in relation to the *Allegory of Poverty* painted on the opposite panel: the spiritual wealth is to be glorified as the eschatological aspect of material poverty voluntarily embraced for the kingdom of heaven<sup>7</sup>.

Even in the visual translation of Francis ascending to heaven, briefly mentioned in the inscription of the arch by the expression “*ascendit regnaturus*,” the scene of the *Glory*, with the saint surrounded by the angelic hosts and a seraph placed at the top of the lunette, seems very close to the text of Bonaventure, that Francis “was filled with good things from the ardent love of seraphim, until he became like the angelic hierarchies, was taken to heaven by a chariot of fire”<sup>8</sup>. To represent the upward movement, an unprecedented iconographic solution is elaborated: some angels are depicted in the act of lifting with ropes the throne where Francis sits. The throne, the canopy, the cross appearing as a scepter of earthly kingship, are signs that are attributed to Francis in order to express the concept of *regnum*. However the throne, due to the apocalyptic symbolism, is also used in the decoration of the ribs that frame the lunette, and alludes to the final victory of the believer and the promise of a perfect assimilation to Christ<sup>9</sup>.

The cross and the book that the saint is holding illustrate the verses of the inscription in which Francis is defined as “one who renews the law of the Gospel and prepares for all, the way to heaven”. The cross, in addition to indicating the apostles and evangelists, is an attribute of St. John the Baptist, and Francis “in imitation of the Precursor was predestined by God to prepare the way in the desert of highest poverty”.<sup>10</sup> The book identifies Francis as the founder of the Order, but it is also a reference to the Book of the Gospels and then shows the saint as a renewer of evangelical life<sup>11</sup>.

The banner above the throne offers several suggestions of interpretation. The cross emblazoned on the banner seems to allude to *vexillum crucis*, almost assimilating Francis to the risen Christ, but the seven stars could be an apocalyptic quote, especially since, being at the top of the fresco, the banner is located near the keystone of the vault decorated with the figure of the Son of Man who “had in his right hand seven stars” (Rev. 1:16)<sup>12</sup>. However, accepting the interpretation that connects the banner to the seven appearances of the cross by which Francis “was completely transformed in the image of the Crucified” and “deserved the standard of the cross to be imprinted on his body”, it has the function to recall and emphasize the significance of the stigmata attributed to the saint both in the *Glory* and in *Allegories of the vows*<sup>13</sup>.

The stigmata confirm the sanctity of Francis, being the “seal that made him similar to the living God, that is Christ crucified,”<sup>14</sup> but in this context they remind the friars of the observance of the Rule, divinely inspired and confirmed, according to Bonaventure, by the impression of the stigmata on the body of Francis<sup>15</sup>.

The frescoes of the crossed vault proclaim the rule

as a promise of salvation to the friars gathered under the vault around the altar/tomb of the founder of the Order. The *Allegories of the vows*, and the *Glory of St. Francis* speak through a play of references and opposites, namely, the one who was stripped of everything for the sake of poverty, will be covered with a robe of light; the one who became humble and obedient, will sit on a throne; the one who has pursued chastity, will be made like angels

Francis glorified indicates, in the observance of the Rule lived in the three vows, the way to heaven.

## NOTES

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1. For a critical debate about the attribution see, Alessandro Tomei, *La decorazione della Basilica di San Francesco ad Assisi come metafora della questione giottesca*, “ImagoRomae” [online] February 22, 2009.

[http://www.imagoromae.com/public/ftp/fotoDiServizio/files/Giotto/Saggio\\_Alessandro\\_Tomei.pdf](http://www.imagoromae.com/public/ftp/fotoDiServizio/files/Giotto/Saggio_Alessandro_Tomei.pdf).

2. Milvia Bollati, *Gloriosus Franciscus: un'immagine di Francesco tra agiografia e storia*, Efr-Editrici Francescane, Padua 2012, p. 132.

3. Bollati, *Gloriosus Franciscus* cit., pp. 79-80.

4. Janet Robson, “The Pilgrim’s Progress: Re-interpreting the Trecento Fresco Programme in the Lower Church at Assisi,” in W. R. Cook (ed.), *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2005, p. 44.

5. Bollati, *Gloriosus Franciscus* cit., p. 96: the inscription on the panel of the *Glory of St. Francis* reads “...ator renovat / iam normam evangelicam / Franciscus cunctis preparat / viam salutis celicam / ; paupetatem dum reparat / castitatem angelicam / obediendo comparat / trinitatem deificam / ; ornatus his virtutibus / ascendit regnaturus / his cumalatus fructibus / procedit iam securus / cum angelorum cetibus / et

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*christo profecturus / formam quam tradit fratibus / (sit quisque secuturus).*” “(...) Francis had renewed the law of the Gospel and for all he paves the way of salvation in heaven, while he keeps poverty and the chastity of angels by obeying permits him to reach the divine trinity; adorned with these virtues, he ascends destined to rule, full of these fruits he proceeds fearlessly with the angels of God and Christ; it will benefit each to follow the rule that he gave to the brothers.”

6. Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Legenda maior, prologus I*, 2, 3.

7. Bollati, *Gloriosus Franciscus* cit., pp. 97-98.

8. Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Legenda maior, prologus I*, 6.

9. Bollati, *Gloriosus Franciscus* cit., p. 103.

10. Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Legenda maior, prologus I*, 5.

11. Bollati, *Gloriosus Franciscus* cit., p. 125.

12. Bollati, *Gloriosus Franciscus* cit., pp. 115, 127.

13. Henry Thode, *Francesco d'Assisi e le origini dell'arte del Rinascimento in Italia*, Donzelli, Roma 2003, p. 421; Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Legenda maior, opusculum III*, I, 8-9.

14. Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Legenda maior, prologus*, II, 3.

15. The link between the stigmata and the approval of the Rule is shown in *Legenda maior*, IV, 9-10.

# **BECOMING A SIGN OF GOD'S PRESENCE**

## **Study of Franciscan Vows and Values**

*“Praise to You, O God, for those who, by their disturbing presence, respond to Your challenge to rebuild our Church, our world, and ourselves.”*

IFC-TOR General Assembly, 2009<sup>1</sup>

### **INTRODUCTION**

As the Ministers General and Delegates of one hundred-one (101) Franciscan Congregations who follow the Third Order Regular Rule raised their voices in this petition at the Assisi meeting in May, 2009, many of them must have found their thoughts turning toward the young 21<sup>st</sup> century religious in their Congregations who are preparing to take up the challenge to walk into their world with the Divine Presence, their Beloved, as followers of Francis and Clare, exemplars of disturbing presence chosen by Jesus Christ for their world.

Through that week in May, 2009, the Assembly dwelt on “how do we as Franciscans disturb the world in which we live;”<sup>2</sup> they ended their deliberations by committing themselves “to call and form new members to follow, not in our footsteps, but in the same footsteps of Christ as disturbing disciples.”<sup>3</sup>

The council of the IFC, shortly after the General Assembly, accepted as their charge to encourage the IFC members to discuss in their local communities “ how the living of evangelical Franciscan TOR life may become a disturbing presence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the same way as were Francis and Clare in their time.”<sup>4</sup> The Council provided articles in the Propositum, Volumes 13 and 14, December 2010, June and October 2011, to assist

members in reflecting on the meaning of the evangelical counsels and on how the vows and the four fundamental values of the Rule are perceived in their various cultures.

The Council further pursued the Assembly's vision by inviting all the IFC-TOR Congregations to engage their members not yet in perpetual vows to reflect on questions pertaining to the vows and values of the TOR Rule.<sup>5</sup> In brief, the questions were:

*As Franciscans, how can we live our evangelical vows in a meaningful and challenging way in today's world?*

*What do you think should be given priority in following Christ as a Franciscan in a meaningful and relevant way as we practice the fundamental values of our TOR Rule: conversion, contemplation, minority, and poverty?*

This paper provides a study of the evangelical vows and fundamental values based upon the reflections of the young religious whose Congregations accepted the invitation of the Council. With these reflections so sincerely thought through and honestly expressed, the leaders and indeed all who take the opportunity to read the study will discover that living the vows in today's world, whatever the culture in which the young religious find themselves, they do recognize the challenge that face our Franciscan way life. They strive, in words well-chosen, to determine how these vows and values defined for them by the 13<sup>th</sup> century Franciscans can lead them to be "a disturbing presence" in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

## THE EVANGELICAL VOWED LIFE

The women of faith in this 21<sup>st</sup> century who have recently embraced the evangelical way of life which Saint Francis enunciated for his 13<sup>th</sup> century followers recognize the importance of the canonical vows and. In their reflections submitted for the International Franciscan Conference – Third Order Regular study, they show an understanding of the vows' relations to their contemporary life. Some of their comments on the vowed life in general are presented here:

“When we choose to profess the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience we are deepening that Baptismal commitment and choosing to express our lives as proof of God’s undivided love for us individually as well as for His love for all people.”

“Being quiet witnesses in a boisterous society, being sent as guests to various parts of the world, living in relation with one another and with those we serve is the way we Franciscans live out the vows in a meaningful and challenging way in today’s world.”

“Being consecrated places us in the position of breaking the mold of our present day society. Fidelity to the vows we profess helps to create a way of life in harmony with all those around us, with nature and God, thus providing a difference in today’s world.”

“The vows are means to live our consecration through which we confront the challenges of today’s world.”

“We live the evangelical vows with enthusiasm in the following of Jesus Christ, allowing ourselves to become passionate for His Gospel and His work



for the Kingdom. Our vowed life maintains us in conversion and innovative creativity which challenges us to live in the love of all God's creation."

## **THE VOW OF POVERTY**

For Francis and Clare, the vow of Poverty directly pointed to the Poor Christ Who "though rich beyond measure, emptied Himself for our sake." Like Christ we are to be content with little of this world's goods, "beware of money," and be "happy to live among the outcast and despised." Francis defined poverty, in the Rule of 1221, saying "Christ is evangelical Poverty." Through dependence upon the Son of God the religious becomes the poor one. (Article 21)<sup>7</sup> Radical poverty, rather than only denying a Franciscan the right of ownership, encourages detachment from worldly possessions and recognition of dependence upon Divine Providence in every aspect of our lives, individual and fraternal, cultural and cosmological, social and psychological. The young religious reflected on Poverty thus:

"The vow of poverty is the vow of mutual sustainability. We are to be good stewards of all that God has entrusted to us, without possessing things. We need to take care of what God has given us. We are to be countercultural in our world where material goods are so much more important than people."

"Poverty for the consecrated person is a commitment to hold one's possessions in common and to live a simple lifestyle in a spirit of charity and humility. Poverty means giving of one's time and talents to another. How we practice poverty in

community determines how we share it with others in the world.”

“I see my vow of poverty, requiring many things of me – a self-emptying of my will for the goods of others and a self-emptying of material goods that I have acquired for the good of those who have less.”

“In poverty, we detach ourselves from the comfortable life that the world offers. We make use of property, money and technology for the service of others, especially those who are neglected and marginalized. We witness and proclaim to others that the goods of the world are not ours but must be shared with everyone.”

“My vow of poverty allows me to be a simple, poor, fraternal presence in the heart of the Church, open to the cries and needs of today with a special option for the little ones and the poor.”

“We can live the vow of poverty by living a simple, austere lifestyle, having a preferential option for the poorest and needy, living in solidarity with them.”

“The vow of poverty calls us to give up the need for possessions and, like Francis, we are invited to choose this vow for a greater Love and learn to depend upon the Father who is the source of all good; We reach out to all who are in need of our help. . . In a world and society marked by consumerism we are called to live the ethic of enough and relate to material goods with a spirit of detachment.”

“In a society which places all its security on material goods, to live the vow of poverty is to place all security on God, the sovereign Good. To live this vow is a challenge; it is to be attentive to

the reality around us, give due value to the person, not for what the person has and does but because of what a person is: a child of God.”

“The vow of poverty means being just and in solidarity with others in the use of things, not as objects to consume and discard, but as assets that are at my service to use and take care of, without waste or excess. To work with what is “enough” and not to demand more. The vow means being poor in relationships, without being overpowering and always in charge; being attentive to the needs of the truly poor, coming to the defense of those who are weaker than I.”

## **THE VOW OF CHASTITY**

The young Franciscans’ reflections on the vow of Chastity demonstrate a realization of the relationship that exists between the Creator and all God’s creation, a recognition that each chosen spouse of Christ shares a responsibility “in all of their works” to allow that “the love of God and all people should shine forth.” There exists evidence, in these neophytes’ words, of an awareness of the preferential love for Christ, gifted in each of His Spouses.

“Embracing celibate chastity tells me that I cannot share myself totally with another person because of my experience of God. This implies a personal, intimate experience of God, a personal companionship shared in religious community with others who have also chose to respond to the call. Our celibate life allows us to give witness to the world of being in relationship with self, others, God and God’s world.”

“The vow of Chastity, provides us to live a commitment relationship with respect, honesty and openness, and a life of loving God and neighbor with an undivided heart. It needs a balanced life style, maturity and integrated personality to be able to be emotionally, psychologically and spiritual stable, and totally self-giving.”

“We give our undivided hearts to God alone. He is the source of our love and affection. It is out of love for Him that we can help others come to appreciate a healthy sense of their human sexuality within the context of their vocation.”

“In the spirit of Chastity we proclaim universal sisterhood and brotherhood in unconditional love and teach others to love one another as God loves us.”

“In living the vow of chastity, the heart of the religious is completely centered on God which in turn allows it to stem forth and reach out to others, encompassing them in Christ’s love, planting the seed of quiet beckoning and humble curiosity.”

“The vow of celibacy is a call to be a passionate lover of God and His creatures, to sublimate the love energy which is the core of one’s being for altruistic purposes. With God’s continuous grace we can be “an other” oriented person in the midst of the sexually charged culture of today.”

“One way we attempt to grow in chastity is learning the concepts contained in the “Theology of the Body.” Understanding intimacy with God, treating everyone with dignity, and being aware of the dangers such as utilitarianism (using others for your own gain). In a world that is overly concerned with power, money, sex and technology, we are

challenged to live a prayer life and counteract worldly desires with truth and reality.”

“Our vow of chastity commits us to build relationships where you can read clearly: ‘I love God whom I do not see because I love you whom I see.’ The vow means a chastity that expresses the profound and fundamental human aspiration to live authentic relationships, a mode of love that makes us grow and mature psychologically and emotionally, growing in human love and in the gift of ourselves towards God and neighbor.”

## **THE VOW OF OBEDIENCE**

When the vow of Obedience received the attention of the participants in the study, it was apparent that they have grasped Francis’ words. “Following the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ Who made his own will one with the Father’s, the sisters and brothers should remember that, for God, they have given up their own wills.” (Article 25) <sup>8</sup> The newly professed religious’ examples show a comprehension, basic but emerging, of the extent and depth that the vow of Obedience imposes: obedience to Church and its ministers, to Community and superiors, and to all the agents who call forth God’s Will, in and beyond the convent walls. (Article 3) <sup>9</sup> As did Francis, these 21<sup>st</sup> century followers embrace the many and various ways of ministry possible in following faithfully “the footprints of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Article 25): <sup>10</sup>

“Obedience means listening intently in order to respond as did Francis. We commit ourselves, as Francis did, to hear from within, giving us the strength necessary to say in “the love of the truth,” what we have heard from the Father. Being obedient means to express freedom in order to be

in solidarity and shared responsibility for what we are asked, an obedience which fosters the 'yes' to God's will and the readiness to serve the Kingdom."

"In obedience we search in all things to do the will of God with simplicity and humility, as individuals and community; we respect each other's differences and show equal dignity; we are open to fraternal dialogue."

"In the vow of obedience the key is to give oneself completely to God who has chosen the consecrated person for Himself, having a model the obedient Christ. This requires a commitment of full faith and freedom."

"The heart of our evangelical life is fraternal obedience through which we attend to the voice of God and seek to fulfill God's plans for this world."

"It's through the obedience of love that I am in communion with my Sisters celebrating the evangelical call in loving obedience. Through obedience we are called to recognize and celebrate each other's uniqueness. It is in loving dialogue, prayerfully communicating a mutual respect, that brings us together living out the evangelical calling. In the Franciscan way of life, Francis and Clare invite us to love each other as Jesus loves us and we commit ourselves to one another."

"We believe in Obedience lived as listening to God in His Word, in the brothers and sisters, in the world, and within our own hearts, as a place where the Spirit dwells and acts."

"To live out the vow of Obedience is to live in an attitude of listening and of availability to the Will of

God which is manifested in conscience, in the Word, in human mediations and events. In the society in which we live, which is individualistic, consecrated persons are a challenge because of the way in which they live and manifest obedience in their relationships with others.”

“My vow of Obedience calls me to search for and to do the will of God, to seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice; with my brothers and sisters in collaboration, Obedience calls me to serve the Church and the world, to create sincere relationships with others and to be really humble and at the service of others.”

“Evangelical Obedience calls for a joyful cooperation in the works of the Congregation according to the needs of the time. In a world where independence, freedom of thought, word and deed are stressed, listening to someone else, surrendering one’s will to another, is something contradictory. Unless and until the spirit of Christ captivates us, and Francis penetrates our vision and our mission, we are not able to live the true spirit of obedience as consecrated persons.”

“In the spirit of obedience we proclaim the value of good news to each other and help the improvement of the people of God.”

“Our vow of Obedience ultimately reflects our direct relationship with God. We listen with an open heart to God’s stirrings that reveal to us His Will.”

## **THE VOWS – a Challenge in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

In their answers to the first question, “As Franciscans, how can we live our evangelical vows in a meaningful and challenging way in today’s world?” most

respondents connected their reflection on each vow with the way of their understanding of their contemporary world, as can be seen in the two previous sections. Some further and perhaps more specific references are included here:

“If we as Franciscan brothers and sisters can live the vows faithfully we witness to the world that God truly loves us and it is possible to love others. In this light money, power, communication and technology become secondary. We begin to use these tools in order to serve God in right relationship with the world. We become the example for all people of how to reclaim their dignity as brothers and sisters created and unbelievably loved and cared for by God.”

“Our actions (as consecrated women) act as the quiet witness to Christ and His teachings in today’s society. Living only for God, renouncing worldly goods, placing our dependence on Him alone are seen in our joy, in how we treat others, how we communicate, how we love. St. Bonaventure calls it ‘the coincidence of opposites.’ Our world looks to vowed religious with wonder, unable to comprehend how we can be so cheerful. Society finds it difficult to understand how religious can be so fulfilling, that less actually means more. It stirs questions in the hearts of society, questions about life and priorities. It creates that inner disturbance, not with the lights and noise of the world, but with the gentle voice of one vowed to God.”

“The young religious understand that religious life is a radical choice. In an age where wealth, power, pleasure are the primary values, to choose poverty, obedience and chastity is a radical and



courageous choice. The vows invite us to move from the periphery of the Gospel to the spirit of the Gospel itself as did St. Francis and St. Clare.”

“We are the daughters of the present historical moment in which we have been called to live in this ‘world of today which is our world’. . . We consider it urgent to perceive the world with justice, not only negatively. . . The Franciscan view is to see that God is in every place and in every person, in every creature. We refer to the experience of Francis who encountered the leper and in the sultan, within the walls of Assisi and outside in marginalization, in his homeland and in the East. Francis was able to see the Grace that each situation brings with it. We want our life to be prophecy, to give hope, to build fraternity and peace.”

“If we Franciscans live the Gospel Way of Life authentically in the twenty-first century and do it with joy (obedience), love (chastity), and gratitude (poverty) in our hearts, our countercultural vows of obedience, chastity and poverty will be a distributing presence to the relativistic, consumeristic and individualistic society of today; and it just may be inviting enough and radical enough that others will want to join us as Franciscans.”

“As in every age, it is important to be alert to the signs of the times, taking into account the historical, cultural, social, moral and religious contexts in which we live in order to actualize and incarnate the Gospel effectively. It is through our choice of consecrated life that the Gospel becomes a visible sign. Through our living the vows, God is loved and blessed.”

“Every individual bears within herself a deep desire to discover and know the will of God. Our vow of Obedience is at the service of this search. In a society where there is so much power hunger, domination and individualism, to witness evangelical obedience requires much courage and commitment. . . Obedience is a call to fidelity and loyalty to the creative God. In the Franciscan tradition there is no control over others. Like Francis and Clare we need to discern personally and together to know what the Lord asks of us. Our searching to know God’s will for us and our world requires attentive listening to God’s voice, discernment and personal and community prayers.”

# THE FUNDAMENTAL VALUES

## INTRODUCTION

As with Article One of the Rule of the Third Order which immediately defines the evangelical foundations of the vowed life and Franciscan identity,<sup>11</sup> so also does Article Two direct the Sisters and Brothers “to live this evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty and of humility.” It is Article Two which presents and gives emphasis to these values by which the faithful “are to persevere in true faith and penance.”<sup>12</sup> The Franciscan’s life depends upon ongoing conversion (metanoia); from this status of conversion, giving it strength, are the values of contemplation, poverty and humility (minority). Commitment to on-going conversion means adapting themselves to a simple life style, with an awareness of being countercultural to this 21<sup>st</sup> century where they are to minister to God’s people.

The young members of the Third Order Franciscans were asked to reflect on the meaning of the values as they seek to understand the charism defined by Father Francis. For some, contemplative prayer as a value was readily associated with living as a religious and was claimed as a challenge. Poverty, vow and value, was identified as one in the experience of many respondents. Minority, cast often as humility in the words of the Holy Rule, received less specific recognition except when the responder placed references to service and ministry within this value so treasured by Francis and foundational to the Fraternity.

In reflecting on the Franciscan values in general, some writers expressed themselves in such comments as these:

“For our religious life the primary emphasis needs to be given to following Christ through the Gospel way of life. Today we must each make a difference as a Franciscan by giving importance to the fundamental values. . . Francis lived in a changing world and introduced a new way of living these Gospel values which challenged the values of his world.”

“Our God is a relational God. As we practice the values of conversion, contemplation, minority and poverty, we must always think of the “other. ‘We must build and maintain relationships with . . . those we serve.’ Every religious. . . is called to an ever deepening relationship with the Lord, yet this relationship should be reflected in our interactions with those we meet each day.”

“In a world of rapid change, in a multicultural world, so much marked by the shifting of values, the option for following Jesus Christ as our choice to live the Gospel values in a significant way . . . and as a challenge to today’s world, is beautiful and urgent, but not easy.”

“Our relationship with God should be the priority in following Christ in a meaningful, relevant way . . . The values of the Gospel and St. Francis’ spirituality have their center in relationship with God. When we are open to building a closer relationship with God, God’s life will overflow through our lives, touching others.”

“I think that our times are very similar to those of Saint Francis. In both cases, it is a question of a crisis of whether in the world or in Mother Church. The problem is in the fact that we Franciscan Sisters are soaked in the mentality of the world that

we do not dare live in a radical Gospel way. I could not give precedence to any one of the Franciscan values. Daily conversion to Christ is necessary; daily contemplation of Him and His creation in order to live in minority, in poverty, in the awareness that He has called us with an infinite and sweet love is necessary.”

“In our life as young religious we are faced with many choices and learning to hear the inner call to turn to God. Material things are so enticing that the choices we make are sometimes against the fundamental Franciscan values. Learning about these values enkindles hope and inspires us to contemplate Christ as did Francis, so as to assimilate the Gospel values and be permeated with the spirit of St. Francis.”

“In our religious life it is necessary to stress the following of Christ through His evangelical life. In the world today, each of us has to mark the difference as Franciscans, giving importance to the foundational values of the Gospel in contrast to the secular world.”

In Article 2 of the Rule, <sup>13</sup> Francis directs his followers, those who “wish to live the evangelical conversion of life” to adhere to the practice of metanoia along with the values of contemplation (prayer), poverty (simplicity), and minority (humility). Young women religious of the IFC-TOR were invited to reflect on the meaning of these four values in their spiritual development. Some responses have been chosen which provide evidence of the young religious striving to understand and appreciate the specific values in their 21<sup>st</sup> century environment.

## **CONVERSION (METANOIA)**

“To have our eyes fixed on Jesus, returning to God in conversion, is a constant force to grow in faith, to see the light of God in all creatures, in the events and the signs of the times. We must have a God-centered life so as to witness His merciful love.”

“Conversion means to grow in confidence so that it is worthwhile and always possible to start again on our journey toward holiness. . .”

“True conversion means to return to the Source of Life, committing myself to do good, to struggle for truth, for love, for peace, for justice; being keenly aware of my own smallness, insignificance, powerlessness on the one hand and the magnitude of God’s love and His almighty power on the other.”

“By continued conversion the presence of God gives us stability and strength to grow into His all-embracing love.”

“Conversion urges us to let ourselves continuously be transformed in the light of the Word of God and according to His Will, to recognize the truth about God, ourselves, and our neighbor, to strive for perfection, to be as perfect as Our Father in Heaven.”

## **CONTEMPLATION**

“Contemplation is an important value that should underlie everything that we do or say. This happens when we deepen our prayer life and be consistent in prayer. Contemplation will help us to develop Gospel living so as to be able to see God

in everything. Francis contemplated Christ in the Gospels and began to see everything and everyone as brother or sister. As young Franciscans we need to deepen our love for Jesus through our study of the Scriptures.”

“It is possible to reclaim the mystery of our vocation through the silent listening to God’s word and to participate in the Eucharist; to discover, through reading and meditation on God’s word, how He breaks into our everyday life in ever new forms and calls us to carry out His Will.”

“Contemplation and prayer give us the closer intimate connection with Christ so that we can hear Him speak with us. Christ was there for everyone when He was on earth and we as Franciscans have to be the same.”

First and foremost we need to anchor ourselves in the values of Christ through a contemplative rhythm of life. It is an inner push for constant conversion from our natural values to Christocentrism. Contemplation – “Passion for Christ” and Compassion – “Passion for humanity” become the key attitudes of a Franciscan follower of Christ. It is an awareness of the sacredness of every person as God’s children arising from a vision of the universal Fatherhood of God.”

“Listening to the Word of God is a central part of the spirituality of the religious. There is no authentic search for God without reading, meditation, praying, assimilating and proclaiming the Word.”

## ***POVERTY (SIMPLICITY)***

“Through poverty, following the example of Jesus Christ (Corinthians 8:9), we try to live simply with freedom in the use of goods and as a means of serving our brothers and sisters better, a freedom that comes from God who fills us with all His goods.”

“In living the value of poverty, I live simply renouncing the consumerism of our present age and I renounce my self-importance as did Jesus and Francis.”

“Giving preference to the poorest, seeing the world from their perspective, as Christ lived on the roads to Galilee, brings us to a new perception of the world around us, to a new awareness which invites us to look again at our life-style, our choices, our criteria from the angle of solidarity; “His state was divine, yet He did not cling to His equality with God.”

“The practice of poverty is an inner attitude, living in generosity and being willing to share with others what we are, having always a preference for the poor and needy.”

“Poverty means to know how to live the moments of full membership and dependence with my sisters and brothers, those more or less close to me.”

“Practicing poverty, the value, means redefining who the poor really are and standing in solidarity with them (immigrants, trafficked women and children, the unemployed and underemployed, women in the Church and society, those in prison and death row inmates, and the mentally ill).”



## **MINORITY (HUMILITY)**

“We must give priority to being humble, taking care of all creatures, that is, the creation of God. In this way, we welcome and love all things for the love of Christ.”

“If we practice the value of minority, let us remember that we are human beings to whom a dignity must be given. Let us find new roads to be brothers and sisters to all. Let us not raise barriers which show our differences but find a common ground which can unite us.”

“Practicing minority means to me to have myself questioned about my life-style: what is really necessary (materially)? What can I give up for solidarity? How can I contribute my part to enhance and preserve creation?”

“To gain the spirit of minority, try to understand that work is a service and not the manifestation of power. Every work, every task is important with none superior to another. Do not be afraid to recognize that the other has capacities and virtues which are superior, greater than mine; accept this and learn to thank and be grateful for everything, even small things. See love in all things and give oneself with love to others in service.”

“Humility is the virtue that leads to the development of the other virtues and helps us to depend on trust of God alone as we strive to address our own and others' poverty.”

## PRIORITY OF VALUES

When the participants turned their attention to the aspect of Question Two regarding “priority” of the practice of the fundamental values which Article Two of the Rule describes, a majority (184) of the religious selected one value as of primary importance while others (93) wrote of the meaning of the four values as relevant to their spiritual life and chose not to prioritize them. There were three (3) papers submitted which did not answer the questions concerning the TOR values.

In the Commentary on Article Two of the TOR, Margaret Carney, OSF, and Thaddeus Horgan, SA, describe “the centrality of metanoia, evangelical conversion” as the root value of our tradition” which “flowers forth in poverty, minority and contemplation”.<sup>14</sup> Nineteen (19) papers containing the reflections of some seventy-nine (79) religious gave priority to this value, metanoia/conversion, acknowledging that the emphasis of “Franciscan Third Order Regular spirituality is first of all a “turning to God and being conformed to Christ. . .an ongoing religious experience.”<sup>15</sup> One entry among those reflecting this prime value reads:

“Conversion urges us to let ourselves continuously be transformed in the light of the Word of God, and according to His Will, to recognize the truth about God, ourselves, and our neighbor, to strive for perfection, to be as perfect as Our Father in heaven.”

Adherence to living a life of evangelical conversion was given due place by many at their present stage of spiritual development, but in sixteen (16) papers for some fifty-eight (58) participants, contemplation was given as

the prime value. Contemplation was described thus in one entry:

“Contemplation – “Passion for Christ” and Compassion – “Passion for Humanity” becomes the key attitude of a Franciscan follower of Christ. It is an awareness of the sacredness of every person as God’s child, arising from a vision of the universal Fatherhood of God.”

Minority was selected by twenty (20) participants in eleven (11) reflections: One group of religious composed this reflection on the value of Minority:

“We must give priority to being humble, taking care of all creatures, that is, the creation of God. In this way, we welcome and love all things for the love of God.”

It can be assumed that, having developed the importance of poverty as a vow, some participants did not judge it necessary to give prime place to the value. However, expressions of ‘simplicity’ and ‘freedom to do God’s Will’ throughout their reflections show knowledge of this attitude of spiritual development, for example:

“In living the value of poverty, I live simply, renouncing the consumerism of our present world and I renounce my self-importance as did Jesus and Francis.”

As did many others reflecting on the Franciscan values, one group which did not prioritize the values concluded with this significant thought:

We are grateful for the gift of the Franciscan charism in the world and for the challenge to translate anew these core values in our lives.”

Most reflections gave indication of their consideration of the relevance of the vows to the values by placing their statements as in the TOR. A few, however, wrote very

specifically of their preference of values over vows in their lifestyle.

“Although there was more energy around the four Fundamental values of our TOR life, the Sisters respected the traditional interpretations of the vows. There is a sense that the traditional interpretations are an inherited part of a masculine and patriarchal system. A re-interpretation might include being countercultural. . . and living the vows radically and visibly, providing space for others to find themselves, to awaken other persons to the spiritual hunger within.”

“We (twelve contributors as a group) find that the four Fundamental values of conversion, contemplation, minority, and poverty have more meaning to us in our daily lives than the vows.”

“According to us, Franciscan religious life is understood more and better from the fundamental values, incarnated daily in a creative way in the diversity of personal and community charisms, and since these are broader than the vows, the values contain and complete the vows.”

## **CONCLUSION**

The Franciscan Congregations who elected to accept the invitation of the IFC Council and participated in this study are to be complimented on the depth of knowledge of the Rule of the Third Order on the part of their young religious but even more so to be commended for encouraging these young religious in their faith and love of their God, Church and neighbor. The ardent desire to follow the way of Francis and Clare is evident throughout these reflections, developed in sincere and

honest style which conveys a message that these young people are prepared or are being prepared to indeed accept the challenges they will face or are facing as they commit themselves to the vowed life. While some chose not to specify the elements of the culture in which the Creator placed their Congregation, others quite concretely developed the relationships of Church, state, society and personhood to their living as Franciscans. The greater majority of writers, as is evident in the selections quoted throughout this study, spent much effort and time in explaining the meaning of each of the vows and showed an understanding of the vows to an extent acceptable for the newly professed. It is assumed that attention will be given to deepening the theological foundation of the vows as their lives in community progress. The eagerness which is exhibited as they offer examples, real and imagined, of living the vows in a “meaningful and challenging way” should give the IFC leaders and directors/formators much encouragement and provide basis for the development of resources to assist the young religious in coping with this 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

While most of the commentators speak with idealism of the evangelical vow of Chastity, their reflections indicate that living this vow will demand deeper understanding and guidance in the practice of Chastity. The many examples of the relationship of the vow of Poverty to lived experience show an understanding more practical than do the idealism of the descriptions of the vow of Chastity. The vow of Obedience, as reflected upon in their first question, is almost always connected to the young religious’ sense of obligation to authority and to service in God’s creation. The statements presented on all three vows suggest that further study of the theological

foundation of the evangelical counsels would profit the development of the young religious' spirituality

In considering the question about the TOR fundamental values, the writers as a whole did not devote as much attention to the topic nor was discussion on the priority of values developed as fully the question on the vows had been. It would seem that this aspect of the young religious' spiritual formation had received less attention or at least is less well-known thus far in their lived experiences. A misunderstanding of "priority" in relation to the religious values in the Franciscan lifestyle kept some from judging the place of the values in their spiritual practices. Perhaps more apparent is the omission from most of the papers of a mention of the fundamental values in relation to the Franciscan charism as Francis defines in the Rule. It is true that the question being studied applied to the values and their practice but with the addition of the phrase "our TOR Rule" following the word "values," it would seem that the idea of "charism" would find its place in the reflections. This writer suggests then, that this is another evidence for studying the Rule more deeply as we work toward helping our Congregations' new members become authentic followers of Francis and Clare.

It should be most gratifying to their superiors and mentors that the religious who submitted their reflections demonstrated an understanding, even tender feeling, for these values treasured by Francis as the means by which he and his followers persevere in their commitment to Gospel living. Their congregations are blessed in their encouragement of the neophytes' desire to spend their lives in service to God's people.

It was with some hesitance that the writer of this study began the task of conveying to readers the

contributions of the young members of sixty-one (61) congregations of the IFC-TOR. This has been a grace-filled project, giving opportunity to study the 1982 Rule of the Third Order, to praise God for the Franciscan scholars who devoted their energies, their lives, assisting their sisters and brothers to walk with Francis and Clare. Especially, this paper is submitted to the IFC Council as a work of thanksgiving and praise to the God Who has provided these young religious to His World in this 21<sup>st</sup> century as exemplars of His Love and Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> International Franciscan Conference of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular General Assembly, Assisi, Italy, May 21, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Rev. James F. Puglisi, SA, "Introduction" Propositum, Vol.12, No. 1, Sept. 2009; <http://www.ifc-tor.org/pub-en-prop2009>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>4</sup> Rev. James F. Puglisi, SA, “ Editorial,” Propositum, Vol. 13, No. 1, December 2010, p.2, Rome, Italy

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The members of the IFC-TOR are to be commended for their communities’ responses to the request for participation in this study. Sixty (60) Franciscan communities submitted reflection papers from their members in first vows. Twenty-eight (28) women chose to write their individual comments of one (1) to six (6) pages. Ten (10) formators identified themselves as compiling their communities’ reflections. The remainder of the papers of two (2) to eight (8) pages presented multiple reflections.

<sup>7</sup> The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis and Commentary, American-English Commentary by Margaret Carney, OSF and Thaddeus Horgan, SA (Washington, DC: Franciscan Federation, 1982), 59.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 65

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 38

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 65

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 36

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp. 36-37

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 37

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.