

## **Called to a Franciscan Life Style: Discernment**

This Reflection is based on material found on page 11 of 18 ff, in the "Vocations" section of the F.U.N. Manual

You're reading a book, or listening to a talk at your Parish, and mention is made of the Franciscan Order, friars, sisters, and lay people. One of the components of the Franciscan family is the Secular Franciscan Order, an order for Catholic lay people, single or married. As a "bona fide" order of the Church, joining this group needs some thought, and a lot of *Discernment*.

On Page 11 of 18, in the F.U.N. Manual (this is the new formation manual of our Order, that has been issued for every OFS Fraternity in the entire world), we have a basic definition of Discernment: "Generally to discern means to make a judgment about something that is not clear. For our purposes discernment is a word that describes the *process* of coming to understand whether or not the Lord is calling and inviting an individual to a Franciscan life style."

There are all sorts of ingredients involved in the discernment to come to a decision if you should join or not, and the best thing is that such decisions do not have to be made all at once. That is why it is a "process." Joining an Order is basically an act of unselfishness - an extension of yourself out of your comfort zone, one needs to ask the Holy Spirit, is this for me, will I fit in, and, are those already in the fraternity eager to have the applicant around. That's all very important. As a long-time professed member of the Order, I have found that all sorts of people come to us. Most of them, once they discern a vocation, will eventually reach profession, but some of them eventually realized it wasn't for them. That is the reason, why more than ever, we now begin these introductory "get acquainted" formation sessions early on.

Back to page 11 of 18, "A very strong fraternal communion," is part of that authentic Franciscan vocation. That means potential joiners must have the capacity to reach out to others. "Our spirituality includes the support and encouragement and inspiration of others in our Order." Hallmarks of our spirituality are Simplicity, Poverty, Humility, a sense of Minority, a complete and active abandonment to God, Conversion, Transformation, and, Peacemaking. Let's talk about these hallmarks....

- *Simplicity*: "There is no pretense in the Franciscan Spirituality. We who live by the Rule of St. Francis, strive to be the genuine article, that is, people who do not care much for fame or wealth - people who live in simplicity."
- *Poverty*: "Love of Gospel poverty develops confidence in the Father and creates internal freedom."
- *Humility*: "The truth of what and who we really are in the eyes of God; freedom from pride and arrogance."
- *A Genuine Sense of Minority*: "The recognition that we are servants, not superior to anyone."
- *A complete and active abandonment to God*: "Trusting in God's unconditional love."
- *Conversion*: "Daily we begin again the process of changing to be more like Jesus"
- *Transformation*: "What God does for us, when we are open and willing."
- *Peacemaking*: "We are messengers of peace as Francis was."

These characteristics that make a Franciscan (no matter which group within its diverse family) should be an initial part of discernment before even delving into prerequisites to join the Secular Franciscan Order. Now, I am sure you will wonder if we discerned all these characteristics right from the start of our life as Franciscans? The answer is, of course, no. Discernment is a slow process and this is why the applicant is given time to work all this out. Do you feel that you have at least an inclination into this direction, and if, after prayer and reflection you feel you do, then we can begin to talk about inviting you "the applicant" to a fraternity meeting. Often people who wish to join just show up.

On page 12 of 18, are found ten signs that a person *may* have a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order. These are as follows:

The individual:

- *Is a good, practicing Catholic.*
- *Has a desire to follow Jesus and His Gospel, the heart of our life.*
- *Has a personal faith relationship with Jesus, not just simply as intellectual knowledge about Jesus.*
- *Is hope-filled and willing and able to deal with life's issues.*
- *Realizes that we are all sinful and in need of conversion.*
- *Has some knowledge of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi.*
- *Is willing and able to commit to the Rule of the SFO\* and to live in fraternity.*
- *Trusts God and realizes the importance of God in their life.*
- *Has a reverence for all creation and a sense of courtesy and respect for it.*
- *Is willing to embrace a counter-cultural stance that is part of life in fraternity and are able and willing to share creative ideas and life with others.*

(\*) SFO = "Secular Franciscan Order"; our official name is "Ordo Franciscanus Sæcularis" hence the use of the initials "OFS" after the name of the Professed.

Thus, discernment takes in a big area of concern - how do you feel about this, are you able to "see yourself" living that type of life style? Profession in the Order is a life-long commitment so you should be fairly sure what you aspire to. As mentioned, all of this takes time, and that is why the Order has allotted certain time periods to these phases in your preparation.

On page 13 of 18, in the above-referenced text, are four very important items every Secular Franciscan agrees to:

- *Personal presence at gatherings.*
- *Witness to the Gospel.*
- *Daily Prayer*
- *Active collaboration, in accordance with each one's situation and possible obligations for animation of the fraternity.*

(Article 30.2 Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order)

"During the formation process one will learn more about the Secular Franciscan way of living by studying the *Rule*, constitutions and many other resources. A person can learn even more about the Order by

experiences with the brothers and sisters in a local fraternity. They inspire, encourage and support us in our efforts to live the rule of life we profess."

Those who feel called, will find this process of formation a rich experience, and will experience a growing love for God and neighbor. They will experience God's transformation in themselves.

As a professed Secular Franciscan I have always felt this vocation is truly a gift of God. It has put a positive direction into my life and my commitment deepens every day. When you respond to this call with all your heart, you will come to feel a joy and firm commitment to God and to others. If you discern this Call - please come join us.

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS

## **Franciscan Identity: We are a single family**

This Reflection is based on material found on page 8 of 24 ff, in the "Identity of a Secular Franciscan" section of the F.U.N. Manual

"We are a single family united by our founder and our history."

"The spiritual emphasis for the First Order is minority. The spiritual emphasis for the Second Order (Poor Clares) is poverty. The spiritual emphasis for the Third Order Regular and the Secular Franciscan Order is conversion (penance)."

The Secular Franciscan Order was called the brothers and sisters of penance in earlier times. "Our identity as **Franciscan** Penitents begins shortly after St. Francis was given the gift of penance by the Lord and became a penitent himself. Quoting from his *Testament*:

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world." Source: "The Testament" para. 1.

Our Vocation or Call is truly a gift of God because Brother Francis was converted through penance before he asked us, brothers and sisters of penance, to aspire to conversion. The spiritual life of a Secular Franciscan in the 21st Century, can only grow through inner conversion. A "Franciscan Reflection" I wrote earlier this year gives some general points that one might aspire to in this metanoia or conversion. See: [Inner Peace](#). And for a Franciscan those points of inner peace should be basic goals.

As reflected on page 8 of 24 of referenced subject in the F.U.N. Manual, Article 13 of the General Constitutions reads, "*Rule 7* Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times "the brothers and sisters of penance", propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually and in fraternity, are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God."

Let's repeat these suggestions in Rule 7:

- listening to and celebrating the Word of God;
- review of life;
- spiritual retreats;
- the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations.
- approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God.

The Rule was written by St. Francis, so apparently there were "penitential celebrations," in his time. We have the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a means to confess our sins, atone for them and try again to please the Lord.

Secular Franciscans, in fact, all Franciscans listen to and celebrate the Word of God by the frequent attendance at Holy Mass, and nowadays many, if not most of us, use the "Liturgy of the Hours" as a daily set of prayers in communion with the rest of the Church. For the SFO it is, of course, not mandatory to pray the Hours, but we do it anyway. In that, too, there is a penitential dimension. All Franciscans go on retreats, either personal, in-house (friary, convent) or in some other communal setting (e.g. fraternity), and with the SFO very often as "Days of Recollection." These are valuable days especially when we have the help of a Franciscan spiritual assistant in our midst. The Franciscan tradition needs to be an integral part of Franciscan life - how well this works with the participation of a spiritual assistant. In order to live this life we need more than just an intellectual knowledge of St. Francis and his teachings, we need to incorporate the life in our own spirituality.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is an *invaluable* spiritual tool to guide the penitent through Spiritual inner conversion. Without using this wonderful Sacrament, staying close to Jesus, and under His guidance to everyone else, is much more complicated.

"We have a responsibility to show the temporal world that the Gospel and the Franciscan Charism can be lived in any age, under all conditions and in every stage of life. It follows, our identity as secular people—people in the world—is indivisible from the other components of our identity and we should "wear" our secularity with gratitude to the One who bestowed it upon us."

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
June 20, 2012

## *Reflections on Formation Topics in the "For Up To Now" Manual*

### **The SFO—An Integral Part of the Catholic Church**

This Reflection is based on material found on page 17 of 24 ff, in the "Identity of a Secular Franciscan" section of the F.U.N. Manual

"In Canon Law the Secular Franciscan Order falls within the category of a Public Association of the Faithful. (cf. Canon 303)

"Associations whose members share in the spirit of some religious institute which in secular life, lead an apostolic life, and strive for Christian perfection under the higher direction of the same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name."

The SFO General Constitutions, further define our status in Article 1.5 and states:

"The Secular Franciscan Order is a public association in the Church. It is divided into fraternities at various levels: local, regional, national, and international. Each one has its own juridical personality within the Church."

"The Secular Franciscan Order differs from other Third Orders in a significant way, and it is important that we are aware of the characteristics specific to the SFO.

- The SFO shares a common **founder** with the First and Second Order—St. Francis of Assisi
- The SFO is not associated or affiliated with the First Order or TOR—it is **autonomous** and **self-governing**.
- The SFO shares in **vital reciprocity** with the other branches of the Franciscan family and has **equal dignity**.
- The SFO was given the **same charism and mission** as the other branches of the Franciscan family. In our Secular state, we, too, continue the mission of St. Francis to rebuild God's Church.
- Our Rule and Constitutions are **approved by the Holy See** and not by the Ministers General of the First Order and Third Order Regular.
- Members of other third orders may belong to more than one third orders. **Secular Franciscans may not.**

The above is found on page 18 of 24 in the "Identity of a Secular Franciscan" section of the F.U.N. Manual, and it is crucial to how we think of ourselves. This is a major difference from the old "Third Order" system. Unfortunately, many older members' understanding of our role as an Order in the Catholic Church sides with

the old system, and not enough realize that we are a self-governing order in the Church, and that our Rule and Constitutions are approved by the Holy See.

What does this all mean to the individual professed member? Well, not so much really. We strive to obey the Rule of St. Francis as best as possible, and that is hard enough. However, it does make a difference on the level of fraternity ministers, because of our relationship with the Church. St. Francis tells us what our identity must be if we are to be true to our calling.

The Conclusions on page 19 and 20 of 24, are important and should be taken to prayer or meditation. This is followed by a "Prayer Service" which is too long to reproduce here, but is great for fraternity use.

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
June 20, 2012

## **Francis and the Franciscan Trilogy**

This Reflection is based on material found on page 6 of 18 ff, in the "Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order" section of the F.U.N. Manual

"The Franciscan Trilogy [the Three Orders] is the first (and only) religious experience, preordained to apostolic life, born simultaneously, and designed to include all states of life.

"Francis received from Christ very precise directions: "go, repair my house..." The Pope clearly confirmed this directive for Francis and his followers: to accomplish in themselves conversion and preach it to others (*facere et predicare pœnitentiam*).

"Francis began work immediately and put all his confidence in the Spirit. He did not deliberately intend to *found* three Orders. However, in the institution of his three Orders, Francis let himself be guided solely by the Spirit of the Lord. He welcomed this reality as it flourished in his hands, without any predetermined plan."

Let us realize as we read this lesson, that as followers of so humble a Founder, we should also totally rely on the Spirit of the Lord—in everything we do. Jesus told us many, many times in Holy Scripture to worry less and rely on the Word: His teaching, His advise.

"Essentially, Saint Francis have his three orders only one rule: **a more perfect observance of the Gospel, according to their state of life.**

"The commitment of a permanent conversion to the Gospel (*facere pœnitentiam*) must permeate the life of all three Orders.

"In view of their preordained apostolic mission, the three Franciscan Orders are not related among themselves hierarchically, but from their very beginning, are equal and need to recognize both their spiritual interdependence and their need for mutual assistance.

"Within the context of the Fourth Lateran Council, St. Francis is the first person to found a religious trilogy that provided for living a religious life regardless a person's of the state of life."

In the last sentence, there could be a typo, but I have copied it as printed in the FUN Manual. Also, please note that I have not copied every paragraph in this reflection, but just enough to discuss this theme. /FS

This whole concept of St. Francis is rather unique. Maybe Francis was thinking of the Trinity (One God-Three Persons), e.g. One Rule-Three Orders, because we know that St. Francis was devoted to the Holy Trinity in his ideas, beliefs and prayer. Permanent conversion to the Gospel, i.e. metanoia, inner conversion - again has an element of penance. If we are to become perfect, there is suffering involved. To live the Rule of St. Francis one must be willing to say YES to concepts that are difficult, that are counter-cultural, and that absolutely do not fit in the 21st Century, but it can be done. There is a whole roster of Franciscan Saints and Blesseds and they have



done it! They have lived the Rule, and with the Grace of God, and the help of our Founder, so shall we. It comes down to a willingness to love God unconditionally.



This family tree is found on page 5 of 18 and clearly indicates our relationship to the other parts of the Franciscan Family.

Even though the Three Orders are autonomous and independent, we rely very much on each other, and that goes both ways, and has been so clearly shown in "Profession, A gift of the Spirit." by Fr. Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap. [General Chapter, 2008].

I'll stop here for today. In these reflections, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I hope to cover the most important aspects in the F.U.N. Manual. As I read further, each day, all of it is important. This new formation program is exactly what the Order needs to bring everyone to the same page, so to speak.

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS

June 21, 2012

## Structure and Governance

This Reflection is based on material found on page 13,14 of 18 ff, in the "Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order" section of the F.U.N. Manual

"Today the SFO has a **centralized structure of government** (see structure of SFO in Appendix 2). It has acquired the self-awareness of being a single Fraternity [comprising of all levels of fraternity] with respect to its structure and has decided to overcome the divisions that occurred within the First Order.

"Governance is accomplished through the fraternity councils at the various levels in a relationship of collegiality and consensus, with most activities being conducted at the lowest possible level, (called subsidiarity), in order to afford the local fraternity the highest degree of flexibility within the Order.

"Higher levels of fraternity exist to animate and guide the lower level (local) fraternities and intervene only when an issue cannot be resolved at a lower level or when it involves more than one fraternity.

"We must become fully aware of this centralized structure of government in order to acquire the necessary sense of belonging to both our local fraternity and to all of the fraternities at higher levels. We live out our profession within our own local fraternity where we are called to serve, but we are also part of the whole Order and may be asked to share our talents and gifts at higher levels of fraternity. We become part of the whole and need to embrace this reality and accept a true sense of belonging at all levels of the order."

At the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region Annual Meeting held on Pentecost (weekend) 2012, at San Pedro Retreat Center, which I attended, I recall that Deacon Tom Bello, OFS (National Minister) mentioned something about this. He said, "Each of us are in a lineage of 4 Fraternities, International, National, Regional, and local Fraternity." And I thought at the time how novel this is, considering that in the old structure (pre-Rule of 1978) that was really never the case. But here we have it again, "We become part of the whole and need to embrace this reality and accept a true sense of belonging at all levels of the order." (as in previously quoted paragraph).

The chapter continues that "**Profession incorporates the person into the Order.** (Gen. Const. 42.2 and Preliminary Notes of the Ritual, 14c), that is into the Order as a whole, so it is not possible to live in this reality without being aware of all the members that make it up.

When I was privileged to attend the General Chapter of 2008 (Hungary), the sense of belonging to all levels was palpable. If you had been there, I think you would agree with me.

"The Rule of **subsidiarity**, then, is crucial.

Local Fraternities are the fundamental units of the Order and in them, live our brothers and sisters.

The Fraternities have (and should have) a broad capacity for self-determination and what they are properly able to do. They must do this without undue intrusion of higher levels.

The regional and national governing bodies are liaison and coordination structures designed to offer service, guidance and to guarantee legality. Their primary objective is to serve, link up, coordinate and, always, animate and guide."

So who are these regional and national governing bodies, for example for S. Franciscans living in Florida? The Regional fraternity is "Five Franciscan Martyrs Region," and the National Fraternity is NAFRA or National Fraternity (USA). Each country where there is an Established Secular Franciscan presence, has a National Fraternity and if the country is large, there will be Regional Fraternities.

The chart in Appendix 2 (page 18 of 18, in the chapter titled, "Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order) shows this relationship from the Local Fraternity (All Professed Members) to and including the Presidency - International Fraternity, it really needs no further explanation. Important to this structure is that "the Spiritual Assistance of our Order is provided to us at the request of the Holy See and with our concurrence."

In USA we are far away from those who serve CIOFS, and yet we are not. CIOFS consists of Professed Franciscans elected by the International Councillors who reside in many different countries. When they meet in official meetings, they come to Rome or other suitable locations (in 2008 it was Hungary, and last year, they met in Brazil). These servants within our Order are elected from among the Professed. They are part of us, and we are part of them. Even though Divine Mercy Fraternity in Vero Beach, FL, is where I serve, the brothers and sisters of the Regional, National fraternities and CIOFS are never far from my thoughts. We are ONE - We are the Secular Franciscan Order. It is a joy to be a Franciscan!

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
June 22, 2012

## Vocation, Charism, and Mission

This Reflection is based on material found in the Vocation, Charism, and Mission section of the F.U.N. Manual

"Vocation, Charism, and Mission of Secular Franciscans" written by Benedetto Lino, OFS, Coordinator of the Formation Commission International Presidency contains some information that should be read by all Secular Franciscans even though some of it was covered in previous reflections. Ben Lino did an outstanding job with the whole FUN Manual.

In a Foreword to this section, he recalls that too often, especially in the past, candidates were admitted into the Order simply "because they were good and pious people." How well I recall similar situations in my own fraternity when it got started in 1992/1993, where people were allowed to join because they wanted to deepen their spiritual lives. That's a very nice reason for a Vocation, but it is not enough. Then I recall a person who felt called to join because he really loved the Franciscans. Again, a wonderful thing, but in itself not a sound reason for joining the SFO. And Ben Lino, in his foreword cites another example: "Often, until today, people ask to enter the Order because they feel lonely or because they need to feel part of a group or simply out of devotion." Again, not a good reason to join the SFO, and had these people been admitted (and some have), that is why they tend to fall away some time after having been professed.

"It is not possible to speak of *vocation* without reference to *Communion*. Communion is the **aim** of the call of God (the vocation); the **foundation** of our **hope**, the object of our **faith** (communion with God), and the immediate and ultimate accomplishment of the sense of life (**love** with God and with each other)."

"St Paul exhorts us strongly in this direction:

*"May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what **hope** his call holds for you, how rich is the glory of the heritage he offers among his holy people..."* because *"there is only one **hope** to which you are **called**, the one of your **vocation**"* (Eph 1: 18-19; 4:4)

"Through Revelation we know that **God is Love**.

"But in order for the love of God to reach his goal (the vital sharing of His life with his creature [the *Other*, each of us], it is necessary that we **exist**; (*ex-sistere* = to be outside) and also for us to realize our complete "otherness" from God. Once we accept our "otherness," then free will and our specific choice comes into focus. Each of us needs to choose for or against entering into and developing a deepening relationship with the God who is our loving Father.

"This is, therefore, the PLAN OF THE FATHER-the inconceivable, the Eternal, the Infinite, who "thinks" of us from the beginning as the focus of his love and *calls us to life to exist and to share eternally in His Life, His Divinity!* It is unparalleled, hard to grasp and understand that God loves and desires us!

"In the Son, God creates us, and in Jesus He "assumes" the fullness of our Humanity, individually and collectively, so that all human beings, individually and collectively, may, by His Grace, "be made God-like", that is, become, by Grace, what we are not by nature."

"This is what we are radically "called" to be, to enter into relationship with God and to transform ourselves to be God-like [St. Francis exhorts us to become imitators of Jesus and to conform ourselves to Him].

"But it is only through our free acceptance of this relationship of receiving and reciprocating God's love and his grace, can He introduce us into the sharing of his own life. This is living in imitation of the divine mutual relationship shared between the Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus.

This is our **VOCATION—the irrevocable call to sanctity, the sharing in the life of God.**

(Note all paragraphs starting with a quote mark are in the FUN text)

So far we have not specifically discussed (in this reflection) a Vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order, but the quotations above pertain to all vocations. In short, someone desiring to live this life (the goal of a vocation) needs to already have an intimate relationship with Jesus in prayer, possibly adoration, and most of all, with the help of a Spiritual Adviser.

For those who have seen my previous (and ongoing) reflection series "Franciscan Reflections" will easily recognize that those are all about intimate friendship with the Lord. It is the basis of any serious vocation. Most of those reflections are written for Franciscans.

Now lets talk about the Specific Franciscan Vocation. "In order to answer the question of vocation, you must first understand the essential elements of the *Charism of St. Francis and how they grew into Franciscan Spirituality.*

Skipping some original text (in this reflection) let's review what the Franciscan Way of life requires:

- following Jesus without reservations in the footsteps of Saint Francis. In other words, to be ready, in our specific state of life, to follow Jesus just as Francis did.
- to discover, accept and develop within ourselves the same Charism received by Saint Francis, make it present and bring it to fruition in the world.

This spiritual "style" entails:

- a very intense *Eucharistic spirituality* (kenosis=self-emptying).
- a very strong *fraternal communion – mutual equality.*
- *simplicity*
- love of *poverty*
- *humility*

- *a genuine sense of minority, or littleness – seeking to serve and not be served*
- a complete and active abandonment to God, which is demonstrated by *obedience*, particularly to the Church.

"To have an Authentic Franciscan Vocation means to desire to embrace these attitudes and behaviors that characterize our form of life; this charism-mission, this spirituality.

"Those who, through proper discernment, recognize that their life's call and desire *is to* embrace this way of life, may express their commitment through a **public, solemn and perpetual commitment** (Profession) **before** God and the Church.

"This is the case of all Franciscans of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Order.

"Secular Franciscans, should refer particularly to:

- The whole chapter two of the Rule.
- The articles 37:2-3; 38:1; 40:1-2; of the CCGG (General Constitutions)
- Title I of Chapter 2 of the CCGG.

In the next FUN Reflection I'll reflect on Charism. As previously noted, I've only copied those paragraphs pertaining to this reflection and formators should use the original text of the FUN Manual, not these reflections. That's because the original material is so well written by brothers and sisters who spent much time doing so.

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
June 22, 2012



## Vocation, Charism, and Mission - 2

This Reflection is based on material found in the

Vocation, Charism, and Mission section of the F.U.N. Manual

In this FUN Reflection I'll reflect on **Charism**. As previously noted, I've only copied those paragraphs pertaining to this reflection and formators should use the original text of the FUN Manual, not these reflections. These reflections have only one purpose - to acquaint you what is available in the F.U.N. Manual, and to put emphasis on the use of these valuable lessons for ongoing formation, particularly for those of us who have been professed for many years.

My guess is that if you have been issued one of these F.U.N. Manuals, and you are not someone involved directly as a formator, it is possible that this 2-3 inch stack of paperwork will lie in a closet and not see the light of day until it is needed. I've read some of this stuff already and it is **so good**, and so much more detailed, from, let's say, my formation in 1992-1994, that I am eager to continue to study this material and share my insights at the same time.

The Charism is the core of who we are as Franciscans. It is our "specific mission or goal, the apostolic task of the members of an Institute" - in our case the Secular Franciscan Order.

Note: Sentences in quotation marks or parts of sentences are those quoted from the source material.

If we look at Article 1 of the Rule of the SFO, we read, "*The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the people of God—laity, religious, and priests—who recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.*"

*"In various ways and forms, but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church."*

"We have just read that we Franciscans, all of us, have to make present in the world of our specific time, the **charism of St. Francis** and to accomplish this task, it is essential, for us to understand: the nature of the Franciscan Charism."

For reference, see Paragraphs 799, 800, 802, and 2684 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. (these items are quoted in the F.U.N. Manual).

So what is this Charism of Francis and of his Family? "The *mission* to which Francis is called has an exceptional character and, as far as we know, it has remained unique in the history of the Church.

"To an **exceptional mission** there must be a corresponding **extraordinary Charism** to accomplish it. This cannot be one or more virtues lived heroically, but a comprehensive gift that radically re-shapes a person's whole life, in all its expressions and which prepares it for a specific mission.

"St. Bonaventure writes about Francis: "Surely he was the most Christ-like of men! His only desire was to be like Christ and imitate him perfectly, and he was found worthy to be adorned with the marks of his likeness; in his life he imitated the life of Christ, and in death he imitated his death, and he wished to be like him still when he was dead." (LMj, XIV, etc., for footnotes see F.U.N. Manual)

"But what is the existential characteristic of Christ, the very essence of His life? This characteristic cannot but be that of **"being Son"**, the Son of the Father. His personality is a "son-like" personality. This filial quality penetrates the depth of his mystery."

"We, Franciscans, understand the charism with which the Holy Spirit has endowed Francis as the **experience (ability) of truly feeling to be "a son" in the hands of the heavenly Father**, just like Jesus the Son."

So let us reflect on the words above. This is heavy stuff, and it desires of us a relationship with the Father, which is almost as that of a child. In fact, "filial" is defined as a relationship between a child and a parent. In order for us to understand this filial relationship, it is first important for us to realize that God loves us in a filial way. The Father's total **"Self-surrender or complete self-giving [kenosis]** with an unprecedented intensity, is the great and special gift Francis received. "Francis understood the **essence/nature of God to pour Himself out in love for all His creatures**. This is God's desire; His original intention to enter into a lover/beloved relationship with mankind.

***"O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself for our salvation He hides Himself under an ordinary piece of bread!"*** (LtOrd 27)

This was the gift Francis was given: to perceive, as never before, God's own *humble essence*, the *depth of His love* without reservation. His *poverty*, His *simplicity* and all the consequences that derive from all this, which then became the lived experience and practices of Francis' life.

But how do we accomplish this? Only with God's help! It has been my good fortune (I look upon it as a gift from God) to have spent a year or two with the OFM Capuchins (when I was about 20), and two years almost with the OFM's (when I was an older adult) never realizing why God wanted me to have these experiences. Well, I think I finally figured it out - it became a slow lead in to becoming a Secular Franciscan and, as is the case now, to becoming involved in the formation of Secular Franciscans (through these Reflections among other things). I mention these experiences to reflect on some wonderful Franciscans I have met in the past, people who truly emulated St. Francis, serious about how they lived their Franciscan charism. Brothers who lived an *intense Eucharistic life*, who really took serious their life of *poverty*. And who acknowledged their *Minority-Humility* as a complete self-giving (consequence of kenosis). Friars who lived in *simplicity, obedience, and of course, Chastity*. Men who were fraternity-builders within their fraternity, but also in its universal and cosmic implications, to be lived with special intensity. They did. They lived the *Franciscan evangelical radicality*, as a specific way Saint Francis followed the *total Christ* in simplicity and *sine glossa* (without spitting hairs on Gospel interpretation taking away, watering down or adding to it).

I've also met some Secular Franciscans who try very hard to live simply, frugally, in obedience to Rule and Franciscan spirituality.

"A true "specific" vocation requires that we understand the deep reasons for our attraction to Francis. First to desire and seek the same Jesus "found" by Saint Francis and then to ask if I am ready to develop the same kind of "relationship" with Jesus that Francis lived.

**"If I find the humble God, the simple God, the servant God, the God who has emptied himself, and if I find him in the Son and if in finding him, I make him not only an object of intellectual reflection but I manage somehow to make Him the foundation of my life and practice, as Francis did, then, this is Franciscan vocation."**

Francis' *charism*, then, starts working in me to transform me and enables me to undertake and continue his original mission, in a *personal* way, blending this charism into my own unique life and making it my own.

"We cannot be apathetic or hesitant about living this charism; if we are not committed, then it is not vocation."

With this gift of God, this Charism, comes a "**special Grace**" to live this new state of life, springing from our Profession, which is a true and life-long *nuptial alliance* with God. "This Grace is a gift of the Spouse: we give our life to Him, He responds and totally gives His to us."

Profession is a *liturgical act*: it realizes, what it signifies. For this, a special gift of grace accompanies this consecration of ourselves."

--the **intercession of Saint Francis**, whose spiritual children we become.

--the **inclusion** in the *reciprocal vital communion* of the whole Franciscan Family of today and of all times.

This new gift which we have received in our call, is added to all other particular gifts we have already received. "*Our personal charism*" makes us those unique persons that God has loved and desired from eternity.

After dealing with Charism, we move on to the **Mission** of St. Francis: "To Repair the Church (House).

What is this Church-House? No, it is not the building, stones and mortars. Instead, it is the "Body of Christ" - and the Body of Christ can only be repaired with Christ Himself, through His Spirit!

"As we look at Francis, we see Christ! Francis has become a *sacrament of Christ* ... and Christ leads us to the Father."

"Jesus Himself wants the Father to be the norm and model, the inspiration and aim of all human beings. "*Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" (Mt. 5:48; NMI 31)

"We, Secular Franciscans have to make ourselves available, like Francis, every time the Church calls, every time there is something, anything, to "repair". There are reconciliations to promote, sufferings to alleviate, solitudes to fill, despair to console, marginalization to fight, material and spiritual poverties to heal, respect

for life and for nature, youth to love and to accompany, places to catechize, Liturgies to animate, and Christian Communities to support in anything they might need, etc. These are the places where Secular Franciscans need to be found! There are no limits!

As Children of Francis we must continue his mission!

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
June 27, 2012

Additional commentary, to suppliment what Teresa Baker has written about our Rule:

#### Art. 21

Article 21 needs no additional clarification. The local fraternity's council and minister structure is found in Article 49, and further, in the Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, elsewhere in this website. /fss

#### Art. 23

Article 23 tells us about requests for admission, and that the fraternity's council decides on these requests. The times of formation are more adequately explained in Article 19 (and further) of the Statutes (USA), and when one asks to be admitted, the fraternity council will fully explain to the applicant what is involved. Profession is a permanent commitment, and the Order wants to be very clear about new applicants, that they have a vocation to the Order. /fss

#### Art. 25

The F.U.N. text does not have a particular reflections about Article 25, that is, not in the Rule of the SFO chapter. Each fraternity has a "common fund" to which members are asked to contribute to defray the expenses of the Order. The fraternities have an obligation to contribute toward the expenses of the higher fraternity councils, and you will occasionally hear mention of our "Fair Share." The Professed who can afford to do so, will contribute their portion of the "Fair Share," but if they cannot do so, we do not ask them to do so. /fss

#### Art. 26

Although the Secular Franciscan Order is a self-standing Order, Article 26 refers to "spiritual assistance." Each fraternity requesting Canonical Approbation needs to be sponsored, or mentored, by a Franciscan religious (cf. Article 46, Constitutions of the S.F.O.). Having access to competent religious assistance is extremely important in order to maintain a truly Franciscan character in the fraternity and in its members./fss

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS

## JPIC

This Reflection is based on material found on page 3 of 28 ff, in the "JPIC Session 1, Section 2" sections of the F.U.N. Manual

The Chapter on JPIC - Juspice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, is a difficult one to write one or more reflections on, because there are so many different sources involved. One major source of information is emphasis to study the entire Part Three of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Part Three covers a lot of territory, here's a synoptic view taken from the index:

Part Three: Life in Christ

Section One. Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit

Chapter One: The Dignity of the Human Person

Chapter Two: The Human Communion

Chapter Three: God's Salvation: Law and Grace

Section Two. The Ten Commandments

Chapter One: "You shall love the Lord Your God with All Your Heart, with All Your Soul, and with All Your Mind"

Chapter Two: "You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself"

Part Three of the Catechism covers "Catholic Social Teaching" (CST) but this is not the only source. CST may also be found in papal, conciliar, and other official documents of the Church. Another excellent source for this information is found on the website of the Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB.ORG). CST goes hand-in-hand with the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

JPIC - Juspice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, in the F.U.N. formation texts have been covered by Pat Brandwein-Ball, OFS, who has managed to present us with a great overview of this complex subject.

On page 13 of 28, she reviews JPIC in terms of the Rule:

"Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) "exists to bring about an awareness of the power of the SFO Rule to truly transform the life of the Secular Franciscan thereby having a Gospel effect on the world and our society. In its broadly based goals, it looks at the whole Rule in terms of peace making and bringing about a just society through the everyday experience of Secular Franciscans who, by right of the sacrament of Baptism, are called to create a more "fraternal and evangelical world." (Guidelines for JPIC Committee)

"Through the integration of our Profession—permanent commitment to Gospel living, The SFO Rule---our way of life, and the General Constitution---defines our identity as secular Franciscans, Candidates reflect upon the manner in which they respond to the vocation, "united more intimately with the Church . . . Go

forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words." (ref. Rule, Article 6)...

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"Our Rule, our penitential life, and our whole way of living are now more than ever hinged on the Catholic Social Teaching concerning the Dignity of the Human Person. The dignity of every human person comes from God. In the Genesis story of creation, God specifically created humankind. We were not created with the other animals. We were created out of the dust of the earth . . . an already created thing, not nothingness. Once formed, we are breathed into life by God; His very breath quickened us. No other creature has this distinction.

"We are created in the image and likeness of God, image of the Son Jesus Christ, body and soul. Our soul is given specific faculties: intellect, memory, and will. These remain forever with us. Created by the same Father we are of one and the same human family."

#### Mission Statement for JPIC

*The mission of JPIC is to assist Professed Secular Franciscans as they reflect on their relationship with God as manifested in the fruits of conversion in their lives.*

*This with special regard to the daily choices made in the areas of justice, peace making and respect for all created things and people; as brothers and sisters of penance, bringing life to the Gospel and the Gospel to life.*

In Section 2 of the Chapter on JPIC, emphasis is on Chapter Two of our Rule.

Let us look at **Article 15**. *Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.*

"The Church has much to say about the testimony of our lives and working together courageously to take up the call to service. There are not "optional extras" ... "The call to service is one and the same as fully living the Gospel ..."

Then there are several quotations from Church documents: Justice in the World, 1971; The Church in the Modern World #30; and Economic Justice for all, #8.

Rule, **Article 16**. *Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.*

"This goes beyond work as a job. Everything we do is "work" in the sense used in our Rule. We are called to be active participants in God's plan. Human dignity takes on a new light. the dignity of those we encounter

everyday in the marketplace, government, schools, etc., all form the new society built of Christ. Workers have both rights and duties.

Then follows four quotations from Church Documents.

**Rule, Article 17.** *In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ.*

"By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journeys by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child. The family is the first and foremost foundation pillar and stands as a key for all else. The blessings of marriage and family, nurturing and educating children for the love of God strengthens all of society.

"Secular Franciscans through their own family honor the Trinity, model of all relationships, and source of all love, inspiration and grace. This article too, goes beyond the immediate family. We are called to be caring and supportive of families everywhere. Family-relationship is extended to all people—as secular Franciscan fraternity, family is at our core.

"Our relationship to everyone is as brother, sister, father, etc.—the family of God-- whether baptized or not—we are children of the same Father. Responsibilities to be family, though not easy, is essential if society is to continue and grow in the Good News. This requires courageous initiatives and being mindful that Secular Franciscans are people of peace...."

**Rule, Article 18.** *Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which bear the imprint of the Most High, and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.*

"We are stewards of the good of the earth. They have been donated to us for the manifestation of the glory of God and proper use towards the common good mindful of generations to come...."

**Rule, Article 19.** *Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.*

*Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.*

"This is the summation of living the Rule: transformation in Christ, messengers of peace and hope in the world with ever more violence, marginalization, secularity, and poverty. Our task is enormous, but by the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will continue to be Good News to others as we await the Father's arms."



Re-read Mt. 25: 34-46 and the Corporal and Spiritual works of mercy. Pray and meditate specifically, how are you called to a Eucharistic life and to a greater awareness of other peoples' needs?

On page 25 of 28 is found "Special Assistance I." This is subtitled "Praying with Eyes Open."

I remember in my experiences with religious life, this "eyes open" or "eyes closed" when praying always led to lively debate, but to synopsise, "Praying with eyes open broadens the view of the world around me. Everything is more vibrant, more alive, more real than previously experienced."

"Every decision to respond to the needs of others is sacred and filled with all that is holy. Every decision not to respond is empty of sacredness. Praying with our eyes open transforms us and aids in making present the Kingdom of God.

When we gaze on the Blessed Sacrament, or on a Crucifix – one begins to see with the eyes of Jesus—and *become* what you gaze upon.

Special Assistance II gives a Theological Reflection, which can be found on page 26 to 28.

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
July 17, 2012

## St. Francis and His Approach to Divinity

This Reflection is based on material found on page 3 of 16, in the "Francis and his Approach to Divinity" – 3-23-2011 section of the F.U.N. Manual

Sentences in quotation marks are from the original F.U.N. text, written by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS (NAFRA), who worked on text written by Benedetto Lino, OFS (Presidency Councillor of CIOFS). The outcome of this combined effort is outstanding! /fss

"Spirituality is based on one's unique experience of God." There is likely no one whose experience is quite the same. Our relationship to God consists of inward and outward signs of trust, love, communication. "The Franciscan experience will require us first to look at God through the eyes and insights of St. Francis and the early Franciscans to gain an understanding of God as Trinity, focusing on the "Primacy of the Father". Next is Francis' image and understanding of Jesus and lastly how we are called into a special relationship with our loving God."

This special relationship is a time of being "alone" with God. "It takes time, effort and presence. One needs to make a constant effort, and the Holy Spirit will lead us to the relationship we seek, and for the Franciscan effect the peace and joy we need to love and serve all God's creation, simply because it is God's and it is good."

Francis' prayer life and approach to God was through the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He was centered on Christ. "Francis viewed Jesus as the only true way to approach the Father. It is this ultimate relationship with the Father that compels and attracts Francis, to be loved by the Father as deeply as the Father loves the Son."

*These "FUN Reflections" only cover the highlights of each chapter of the FUN Formation Manual - it is **strongly recommended** that the original work be read, used for formation of others, and for ongoing formation of the Professed. /Fred Schaeffer, OFS*

"Francis has difficulty believing that God loves him so much that He is willing to give all through His Son, and he wants to reciprocate this love, offering himself completely, *like the Son*, to join in total conformation/unity with Him."

Most of us, Secular Franciscans are trying to find our way in the Franciscan spirituality that is available to us through the Holy Spirit. Having been in religious life (periods of 2, 2, and 5 years in different orders), previously, I have experienced a close relationship with God. How close? I am still a sinner, so I'm not even half-way there. But we keep trying. When we fall into sin, we get up, confess our sins, and try again. That's a very Franciscan ideal, as Francis has stated: "Till now we have done nothing . . . let us try again." Well, that's what most of us are doing. We are somewhat aware that God loves us in a Mother/Father to child manner, in an intimate relationship that is never to be compared to any relationship of the world, because it just isn't. One does not know what love truly is until one's love is perfected in the Lord. Maybe when I am 6-feet under! But we must continue to strive.

This spirituality we're talking about is clearly demonstrated in his writings, as well as in writings about him. The expression "*perfect Trinity and simple unity*" that reveals in Francis the deep intuition of the otherness that characterizes the relationship between the divine Persons that, however, does not call into question their "simple unity": the perfect difference exists in the bosom of total unity. Otherness always focuses one on the complete care of the other, never acting for self, and it is this understanding that will ultimately found the Franciscan family, not on hierarchy of authority, but on the foundation we call littleness and fraternity [the desire to be a servant of everyone else, focusing on the other and thereby being a more effective imitator of Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve!]

"The Father is at the center of the Trinity, source of every action and to whom everything returns: nothing summarizes this vision better than the final prayer of the Letter to the Whole Order (FF 233):

*"Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, grant us in our misery that we may do for your sake alone (propter temetipsum), what we know you want us to do, and always want what pleases you; so that, cleansed and enlightened interiorly and fired with the ardor of the Holy Spirit, we may be able to follow in the footsteps of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and so to make our way to you, Most High, by your grace alone, you who live and reign in perfect Trinity and simple Unity, and are glorified, God all-powerful, forever and ever."*

"The Franciscan approach is to use all prayer to lead us to imitate Jesus for the purpose of entering and deepening our relationship with Our Father, the source of Love unimaginable.

"As Franciscans", we must re-discover the "Father," and reconnect, establishing a truly vital relationship with Him in order "to convert ourselves" into authentic "Trinitarian" men and women, like Francis: to reach out to the Father, through and with the Son, by mean of the grace of the Holy Spirit."

In this chapter, reference is made to our Rule, article 12. *Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.*

Please see page 10 of 16 if the original text, specifically items 1 and 2.

One note surprised me (on page 9), "Francis does not write about or focus on the Cross, which is most unusual for Medieval theology and in many cases today's theology. Francis instead continues to dwell on God's poverty and humility and desire to remain with us, hidden within the Eucharist. The Eucharist is God's action to continue to love and nourish us, giving us Himself in the poorest and humblest form of food, bread and wine, (our food and drink.)

From page 12 of 16 and further, we find a "Part 2. Fundamentals of Franciscan Theology" This is very interesting and I urge you to read and meditate on the original text.

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
July 18, 2012

## Franciscan Theology, Tradition and Spirituality

It is difficult for me to write F.U.N. Reflection(s) on Franciscan Theology because it is a "heavy" subject. I am not a theologian although I am well-read. This F.U.N. Reflection will cover the "Alternate (Franciscan) Tradition" outlined in Figure 2, on page 6 of 30 of this chapter in the FUN Manual. There is a Primary Theology adopted by the Church, and then there is the Franciscan Theology referenced as "Franciscan Tradition (alternate theology)."

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"The theology of the Franciscan School develops from an insight of the Eastern Fathers, namely that the Incarnation is too important and too great an event to be initiated by sin. The insight stimulates a new understanding and hopefully an appreciation of the fullness of God's love for creation."

Rupert of Deutz (OSB) around 1127 was probably the first to state that "the Incarnation was fore-ordained so that God could be present and rejoice with His people. The Cross was the result of man's fall, but the Incarnation was not."

Later in the 1230's Robert Grosseteste (secular clergyman, later bishop) an Oxford Scripture Scholar, believed "that the whole universe reflected the glory of God." Robert taught theology to the new friars. Both Rupert and Robert had great influence of the theology of Bl. John Duns Scotus, OFM and his work would form the basis of thought for the theology of the Franciscan School.

"The Incarnation was **not a reaction, but the initial action** that caused creation in the first place."

"In the Franciscan vision, creation might look more like this: all creation begins with Jesus, who is the blueprint for creation and is the ultimate goal of creation."

- Jesus the Master Plan - Ephesians 1:4
- Firstborn of Creation - Colossians 1:15-18
- Pre-existent Word- Logos - John 1
- Center, focus, reason for creation -
- goal of creation - All things created through, for Him & have their goal/fullness in Him - Colossians 1:15-18

fig 3. Franciscan sequence of Creation

### **Francis of Assisi – vernacular theologian**

Francis was not formally educated in theology but through gift (of God) and experience was able to articulate the loving presence of God so that it was understandable by the poor and unlettered masses. "The foundation stones for Franciscan theology, spirituality and life are based in the **humility and poverty** of God. This

poverty is known as *kenosis*, or God's total giving/self-emptying to be born into the human condition. God freely chose to become human to rejoice in creation."

"Francis in his *Canticle of the Creatures* expresses his understanding of this poverty and humility, turned in love toward creation and goes on to declare that God alone is good and worthy, while man in his exalted position (within the created and ordered world) is little more than a worm compared to the greatness of God. In all this Francis is humbled and in awe of God, who despite all His majesty, desires us and stoops down low in love for us, a love that surpasses and covers everything."

"The Franciscan path is a Spirituality of descent, a way of becoming little and a way to imitate the humility and poverty of God."

(On page 9 of 30) this is stated in Figure 4 (*Foundations of Franciscan Spiritual Tradition*), in two key beliefs, Poverty of God, and Humility of God, and a third consideration: "Our poverty & humility is based on our understanding and embracing our absolute dependence upon God for existence and our need for otherness (relationships)."

Page 10, 11 and 12 of 30 is a short explanation of the works of St. Bonaventure. He is known as the "Seraphic Doctor" and his theology/philosophy carries immense value in the Franciscan family.

"These are some of the key highpoints from the works of Bonaventure to reflect on:  
(please note I'm listing only the key points, not their definition for the purpose of this reflection/FSS)

- **Incarnation** of God's complete self-communication/expression of Himself to creation.

Sin is the least important reason for the Incarnation

- **Trinity**  
"Much of Bonaventure's work leads us deeply into the mystery of the Trinity, and the image of a fountain is possibly the best way to understand the life of the Trinity in his writings...."

"The relationship of love within the Trinity is internal (intra) to the nature of the Trinity, and all creation is the product of that "perfect" and totally shared love. (In Francis' day it was called the fecundity of God and was understood that perfect love shared perfectly must be fertile and productive).

"Still at this time in history, the predominant theology thought was that Jesus came to die for our sins..."

Page 12-17 of 30 cover the theology of (Blessed) John Duns Scotus, OFM. He had considerable influence on Catholic thought.

"In John's writing, though not as well organized as the "Summa" of Thomas Aquinas, the Franciscan School moved away from atonement-based theology, which had become the primary theology of the Dominican School. After many years of debate, the Dominican based approach would become the most widely held theology within the Church, though the position of the Franciscan School as secondary remained and still

remains today a fully accepted Tradition or alternate theology within the Church, so much so that many of our Roman Pontiffs became members of the Secular Franciscan Order."

"It was the desire of God to embrace and in turn be embraced, and this desire, not the sin of man, was the reason for the coming of Jesus, the fulfillment of the intention that became creation. Bl. John Scotus expressed his understanding in his work, the "Primacy of Christ", the theological foundation that stems from the lived reality of Francis of Assisi."

"Scotus places Jesus and the Incarnation firmly at the absolute core of Christian belief. Not starting with the need for a sin offering as we still do today, (we Franciscans so often start here too), but at a beginning based on a total and complete free expression of God's love and otherness. Sure we don't deny that Jesus redeemed us and died because of sin, but Jesus was always God's first intention or master plan and would have become incarnate (taken on our humanity) regardless of sin or anything else."

Blessed Duns Scotus:

- The Incarnation is not a divine thought or reaction to any event, but the cornerstone of the whole plan of creation.
- Everything that was, is & ever will be is based in Christ
- The relationship between divinity & humanity, God & humanity, are intrinsically united and all creation is centered in Jesus.
- **Creation is based on God's absolute freedom and love, e.g. God's very nature, and not a need.**

You are the unique and specific one that is the apple of God's eye.

Thisness (*haecceitas*)

- The doctrine of thisness applied to the human person invests each individual with a unique value as one single individual wanted and loved by God
- Of the infinite possibilities for a "you" the specific unique "you" is the one wanted & loved by God and called into being.  
We are a unique, customized, gift from God.

**"Until we understand that we stand alone and naked before God, without any accomplishment and without any successes, and understand/experience that God is totally consumed with love for each of us, we cannot fathom the depth and passion of God's love and His desire to share this love with us.**

The second part of this chapter, page 18 of 30, onward, will be treated in a separate reflection.

"My God and My All"

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS

August 2nd, 2012

## Franciscan Theology, Tradition and Spirituality

### Part 2. St. Clare of Assisi and her gift to the Franciscan family.

This section (Part 2) - begins of page 18 of 30 of the "Franciscan Theology, Tradition and Spirituality" text in the F.U.N. Manual.

*These "FUN Reflections" only cover the highlights of each chapter of the FUN Formation Manual - it is **strongly recommended** that the original work be read, used for formation of others, and for ongoing formation of the Professed. /Fred Schaeffer, OFS*

"Clare in her instructions to her sisters, placed the starting point of their spirituality at the Incarnation, and focused her instructions on the goodness of God, the goodness of all creation, and that God could not be found apart from world."

"... God himself became human, took on a human body with all its trappings and because of that action denied that sanctity was found in the soul severed from the body."

"For Clare, Jesus showed the totality and completeness of God's love and challenges us to aspire to the same heights of care and concern for each other. Clare called on her sisters and all, especially her beloved brothers (Friars) to realize that heaven is not so much a place out there, but is very much a relationship based on unconditional love. We are also on the path of littleness, called to understand and embrace our complete and absolute dependence on God, and that we continue to exist only because of His love."

"... Poverty and Humility if embraced, open up to us the doors of transformation."

- Jesus reveals the totality/completeness of God's Love and the heights we are called to aspire to.
- Everything that exists is dependent on God, is uniquely and completely loved by God
- For Clare, to enter the door to transformation requires understanding the depth of God's love for each and every one of us, unconditionally and the\* armed with that knowledge and understanding to embrace poverty and humility.  
(\* possible typo in orig. text)

For Francis, this path of poverty and humility is in imitation of the life Jesus loved and the only way for him to move beyond personal needs and wants, "beyond ourselves and to reach the place of transformation and surrender."

These are the keystones: (pg. 19 of 30)

- Poverty is our approach to God from a place of littleness and emptiness. It is not necessarily a poverty of want or need, but a poverty of fully embracing our humanity and recognizing our complete and total dependence on God, (contingency).
- In our nothingness we stand in awe of God's total love for us, God's emptying Himself in order to become our Lover. The only question is will we allow ourselves to be the beloved?

- Humility is our ability to allow ourselves to be vulnerable in order to enter into mutual not using relationships with each other. As God our Loving Father stoops down to embrace us in Love, can we also stoop down low to embrace each other in love. This is the example of Incarnation!

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Beautiful, isn't it? Starting (in the first part of Franciscan Theology, etc.) with Friar Duns Scotus' explanation that God's love is so great that he gave us His Son Jesus in his humanity for 33 years (*to save the world*, to redeem the world by His Death on the Cross), and did so because He loved us, and also did so whether we needed His redemption or not. It is miraculous that St. Francis thought so too, and St. Clare's formation of her sisters brings this out, also. We can learn much from them. It all boils down to taking the 'self' (our own interests) out of the equation and doing everything we can for God and for other people. And, if I read the August 2012 Ongoing Formation (written by Benedetto Lino, OFS) correctly, we are asked to do nothing that isn't required by God from an ordinary person - all St. Francis and St. Clare ask of us is to be the best we can be, not for the few, but for everyone we come into contact with.

The quoted text (page 20 of 30) continues: "[Clare] emphasizes our uniqueness and lovability, pointing out there is nothing in our power that can put us beyond God's love and hopes for us. Our dignity (John Scotus would later define this as our "thisness") comes from just being. We are individually unique and chosen by God as His beloved."

Isn't that enough? What more could we want? Fame and riches will not bring us one iota closer to God!

"The image of God we seek to see in the mirror (Mirror of Eternity) is the image of Christ and our actions are his actions of accepting our call (vocation) and becoming great by becoming the servant of all."

People in the 21st Century have a tendency to say that we should not be servants at all, that we are too big for that. Really? Not according to Francis and Clare. Let us be counter-cultural, and do it as Francis asks us to do - humbly and in obedience to the Gospel, going from Gospel to life, and from life to Gospel. If we are to do something with our lives, let us do it by excelling to do it right! In other words, no half-way efforts here.

"Clare asked her sisters to gaze on the face of Jesus until you could begin to see your own face there. Then you would be at the start of the path that leads to true imitation of Christ."

On Page 23 of 30 begins a comparison "Lectio Divina compared to Clare's Mirror of Perfection" — I encourage all to study this table. The Franciscan form of Lectio Divina (right column on page 23) is quite different from the non-Franciscan form. My personal method of prayer is just sitting in His Presence and silently adoring Him by gazing at the Tabernacle or (at home) on the cross. Just do it. Forget self, forget your needs, bring only yourself to Him in total offering and then immerse yourself in His Love!

Distractions - yes, they are there, but when you notice yourself going in another direction, turn lovingly back to Him, and begin again. That's what St. Francis did. Let us do the same, quietly, with dignity and patience.



"My God and My All"

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
August 3rd, 2012

## Yes, this is what I want

This Reflection is based on material found on page 3 of 18 ff, in the "Profession and the Secular Franciscan" section of the F.U.N. Manual

The title of this reflection is the answer to the Profession formula. Those in ongoing formation have made Profession and strive to live the life of a Secular Franciscan as best as we/they can. These simple words (Yes, this is what I want) should be spoken after proper preparation, reflection, discernment, and without coercion - when you speak these words you, hopefully, know what you are promising. Profession is a Gift of the Holy Spirit.

If we consider Profession something other than a Gift of the Holy Spirit, we can't go on with Profession. We'd need more discernment. It is a serious, life-long commitment. "The moment of Profession is a specific moment. It just doesn't happen. It is prepared for and is joyfully anticipated." (p. 3 of 18). Fr. Richard Trezza, O.F.M, the author of this chapter, refers us to Fr. Felice Cangelosi OFM Cap (Profession in the SFO: Gift and Commitment)-see ciofs.org "old" website - where Fr. Felice says that it is the "foundational moment in the identity of the Professed."

Fr. Felice's cited work is intensely applicable and, in my opinion, a gift of the Holy Spirit in itself. If you ever study any piece of writing, please include Fr. Felice's work.

"The very liturgy of Profession gives one the opportunity to make an appropriate response to God – the One who gave the call in the first place. Participation in the Profession Rite, is a "confession of faith – **confession fidei**" on the part of the one being professed. It says that we believe in such a way, that we are willing to allow our words and actions betray the fact that we are true followers of Jesus Christ and His Gospel."

One important consideration under 1) The Grace of Profession (p 4 of 18) that immediately catches the eye is: "God does *not* allow us to make promises that He is not willing to help us keep." Yes, I believe that too. Same is true in a marriage ceremony - but then one wonders why so many marriages fall apart? There are of course many complex reasons.

The Holy Spirit is called down upon those to be professed during the ceremony in a way similar to the type of invocation prayed at Mass upon the gifts of bread and wine so that they be transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

"Profession is an Action of Christ and of the Church" [p. 5 of 18] - not just our own action. The Church is the whole body of Christ, head and members. Profession is not just an action, but an **event** in the life of the Church. Profession is an event that takes place in God's (Kairos) time. It is part of His saving plan *in time* for us. The text reminds us that when we see Profession merely as an action, something that happened on a given day at a certain time, it is not memorable (at least not long), but Profession is a "transformational event" – **a life changing event in God's time.**

"We are beginning to speak about Profession as a very important, transformational, ecclesial event that it is. We need to give meaning to the idea of Church - ecclesial - as regards Profession. We keep saying "we" are

Church, but sometimes we do not live by that. "The members of the local fraternity make the presence and the action of the Church visible.

*"Your membership in the fraternity is a cause of great joy and hope for the members of this community."*

*These "FUN Reflections" only cover the highlights of each chapter of the FUN Formation Manual - it is **strongly recommended** that the original work be read, used for formation of others, and for ongoing formation of the Professed. /Fred Schaeffer, OFS*

As the visible Church assembles, all have their own ministry in the celebration of Rite of Profession: the candidates, the fraternity and its minister, and the presbyter. Fr. Richard Trezza explains each of these items in detail. Especially in regard to the presbyter, there are a couple of considerations reference to the absence of priests to represent the Church, should the Rite take place during Holy Mass (Yes!) and a note regarding the way of reading documents from Rome, advance planning with the priest, and so on. "The priest is the witness of the Church and of the Order. Although profession is not a Sacrament, it is *sacramental* in nature. It reminds us of God's interaction in our lives..." In short, the priest is witness who manifests the action of the Church. He ratifies or conforms the promises made in the name of the Church.

Continuing with subsection 5 (page 8 of 18), Fr. Felice is quoted: "Sanctification is always the work of the Father, but it is channeled through the mediation of Christ and of the Church, and is realized in the Holy Spirit."

We look upon the Holy Spirit as the love between the Father and His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, thus the Holy Spirit teaches us (as the visible witnesses of the Church) to spread God's Word and His love for us and for our neighbor. "During the Rite of Profession, the Fraternity Minister calls down and invokes the Holy Spirit upon the candidates. This is the same 'calling down' of the Spirit upon those about to receive the Sacrament of the Sick ... upon those about to be confirmed ... upon those to be ordained. When the priest does this at Mass by spreading his hands over the host and the chalice, it is called the *epiclesis*." Fr. Felice, making the connection with the SFO calls the moment of Profession an *epicletic* moment ... another Pentecost when the Spirit comes to dwell with us in a dramatic moment. The Spirit will assist in the action of consecration and transformation."

In the next subsection 6. Profession and the Eucharist. (page 9 of 18), Fr. Richard Trezza continues, and again points to Fr. Felice's talk, "He actually shared with us the theology of the liturgy of Profession thereby giving the best reasons why the rite of Profession should take place within the context of the Mass.

"Mass emphasizes what takes place at Profession, that is, there is a *sacrificial dimension of self-giving* taking place. Remember me saying that the candidates, as baptized persons, have a priestly/victim nature. Cangelosi puts it this way, "*They, [the candidates] by promising to live the Gospel life, make themselves entirely available to God and place their own bodies (persons) on the altar of Christ's sacrifice, as a holy victim pleasing to God.*" Whew! I don't know about you, but I think that's pretty heady stuff. When was the last time you even thought that that's what you did on your Profession day? The connection between the act/event of Profession and the dynamic of the Eucharist is very clear. These two sacrifices – that of Christ the priest and that of the newly-Professed – are lives offered to God and they are real at one and the same time. I underlined the phrase – *entirely available to God*" because that's where the sacrifice comes in. Day in and day out, both

when convenient and inconvenient, in good times and in bad – the Professed Secular Franciscan is to place him/herself at God's disposal.

*These "FUN Reflections" only cover the highlights of each chapter of the FUN Formation Manual - it is **strongly recommended** that the original work be read, used for formation of others, and for ongoing formation of the Professed.* I am repeating this note again, because I have given you an example of Fr. Richard's reaction (with the guidance of the Holy Spirit), to Fr. Felice's statement given at the General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order in 2008. Fr. Richard was present, and so was I, purely by the Grace of God I felt, and I recall Fr. Richard when Fr. Felice's talk was over, emote on the whole experience, that the Holy Spirit surely was in the room ... and I felt that too, it was a meeting I will never forget! The "unity and fraternity" that I experienced there was outstanding! It was a Gift of God, to be sure.

To conclude this "FUN Reflection" I'd like to comment on Subsection 12 "After the Manner of St. Francis." Fr. Richard poses the question - what does that actually mean? "Do we constantly have to go through live asking ourselves the question, "What would Francis do?" Do we need to approximate 13th century Italy in our daily lives? What about radical, material poverty. Must we empty our bank accounts and walk around in rags? Remember, we become Franciscans NOT to become other Francis's, but rather to journey toward Christ and eternal life with God. As one speaker so bluntly put it, "Francis is dead!" The audience let out a gasp ... perhaps it was shocking, but a reality nonetheless. His spirit is alive, of course, and that is the basis for living a life in his manner. But to what extent?

To find out what Fr. Richard wrote in reply to his question, please see "Profession 3-23-2011" in the F.U.N. text (in Candidacy).

"My God and My All"

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
July 7, 2012

## Spirituality of Conversion

This Reflection is based on material found on page 3 of 18 ff, in the

"Penitence - Conversion" section of the F.U.N. Manual

"Conversion is the particular character of Secular Franciscan spirituality—it is the signature concept which specifies the uniqueness of the Secular Franciscan spirituality within the Franciscan family even as minority is for the Friars of the First Order. So what is conversion or as we find it referred to in Franciscan writings—"doing Penance."

..."Conversion is a complex process of transformation involving various conscious movements of the human person. These dynamics, such as the distorting power of bias and the clarifying endeavor of questioning, are themselves complex movements of the intellect. In attempting to explain the conversion experience, the greatest dilemma for Christian spirituality is the understanding of the working of grace, which is itself a mystery. Conversion is caught up in the mystery of grace operating within the human person.

"The clearest understanding and example of the experience of conversion can be discovered through the personal biography. A biography offers a unique understanding of conversion for several reasons. The story of life, in its various stages and crises, can offer insight into the unfolding history of a specific person. The life stories of many of the saints are classic examples and stories of conversion.

Then there is a long dissertation on the RCIA process, where candidates seeking conversion into the Catholic Faith experience conversion as they progress in their study topics. You should read the original text on this subject which is a good source of instruction. [to page 8 of 18].

"From the RCIA, and the process of initiation that it supports, several insights about conversion can be noted:

- conversion is symbolized as a journey of transformation led by the movement of God.
- it is a communal experience involving the entire community in its encouragement and witness.
- the RCIA considers conversion as an ongoing process, celebrated in stages and finding its greatest Christian expression in the celebration of the Eucharist.
- conversion is not a one-time experience but rather a lifetime transformation that is absorbed in appreciating the mystery revealed by Christ.

"In the earliest time, the members of the Secular Franciscan Order were known as Brothers and Sisters of Penance."

The penance in St. Francis' life was very strict. He was hard on himself, and he lived at a time when "public, external acts of penance were considered as outward expressions of an inward reality—conversion of heart. It was not that external acts brought about conversion, rather they were seen as an outward sign of the inward change that they signified."

[p.13] "In St. Francis' time, not all the members of the Order of Penance were in harmony with Church leadership. This was a time of clerical corruption and worldliness of the hierarchy and lax and abusive

conduct of the clergy. This often led to dissociation from the Church leadership and heresy by attempting reform but carrying their efforts too far."

"Francis went into another direction. As a penitent. Francis sought God with his whole heart and aimed to focus upon conversion. He saw the Church as the Body of Christ and wished to relate to it as an obedient son rather than a critic. In order to maintain his bond with the church he sought out the approval of the Pope."

In the "First Letter to the Faithful", considered the first or Proto Rule, five fundamental elements for the penitential lifestyle are given [p.15 of 18]:

1. To love God
2. To love our neighbor
3. To resist the sinful tendencies of our fallen nature
4. To receive of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist
5. To act or live in conformity with our conversion

"Even today, more than 800 years later, there is little more that can be added to live a sincere and authentic penitential life. Living according to this plan will immerse us in the very life of God in the Trinity itself. We have Francis' own words to confirm this:

- The Holy Spirit will come to rest on his penitents and dwell in them
- We are children of the Heavenly Father when we do His will
- In the Holy Spirit we are united to Jesus
- We become spouses, brothers and mothers to the Lord Jesus
- We carry him in our hearts and bring him forth by means of our holy works

Truly, one cannot be more closely united to God than this. This is the Franciscan life in a nutshell. It is always important then for Secular Franciscans to read and re-read the Prologue to our Rule where we find this First Letter to the Faithful in order to constantly renew and revisit the original inspiration of Francis for the Secular Franciscan Order. It is here that we experience the meaning of conversion from the uniquely Franciscan viewpoint.

Note: This "Reflection" consists of portions of the text in "Conversion 3-23-2011 page 1 to 18 of 18" Those in formation should read or be instructed from the F.U.N. Manual. The Reflection is more intended for on-going formation. There are Appendices, 1. "Concerning Those Who Do Penance," and 2. "Concerning Those Who Do Not Do Penance."- again, see "F.U.N. Manual" for this text, or click on: [RULE](#).

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS  
June 30, 2012

## **Fraternity & Francis;**

### **and, Fraternity as a Fundamental Element of St. Francis Spirituality**

These are two separate topics covered in the same set of F.U.N. pages: there are no page numbers of these pages. The first is: "Fraternity & Francis" by Tom Bello, OFS; the second paper is: "Fraternity as a Fundamental Element of St. Francis Spirituality" by Fr. Irudaya Samy, OFM Cap.

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Deacon Tom begins "Fraternity and Francis" with an Outline and Key Concepts. Let's review these. Section I begins with the SFO Rule #14. *"Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively."* Also, found in our General Constitutions Art. 3.3: *"The vocation to the SFO is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion. For this purpose, the members of the SFO gather in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities."*

Continuing with Dcn. Tom's outline, item III *"Therefore, if at the heart of the Franciscan call is Christ, then around that heart is fraternity."*

Item IV *"Why this emphasis on Fraternity to Franciscans?"* we find a number of definitions. Let's just reflect on a few.

A. "God is love, and love is always more than self. Thus, God as God is now alone; Christ as God is not alone; The Holy Spirit as God is not alone.

B. "God is a Fraternity of a Trinity. The basic mystery of the Trinity reveals a unity in community that shows what fraternity should look like.

C. "Further, Christ as a man was not alone. He had a Holy Family: Jesus, Mary and Joseph. He called to Himself, not just one to follow Him, but Twelve, a fraternity of apostles."

Let's go to F. "Francis calls all of us Seculars, not to individually follow him, but together, as "Brothers and Sisters of Penance."

V. *"Fraternity is thus a call to build a community of love in harmony with all of God's children and all of God's creation to reflect Love back to the God of Love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit."*

**"Thus, Fraternity is a call to unity and harmony with all our brothers and sisters, all of whom are children of the same loving God.**

**Fraternity is a call to unity and harmony with all of creation, plant and planet, all created by the same loving God.**

**Fraternity is a call to build a community of love that reflects Love back to the God of Love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit."**

Next, as part of this same chapter in the FUN Manual, we find the paper by Fr. Irudaya Samy, OFM Cap, of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants to the Secular Franciscan Order, entitled: "Fraternity as a Fundamental Element of St. Francis Spirituality."

"Calling" is a basic concept found throughout the Scripture. It is exemplified by call of Abraham in the old Testament, the call of Jesus in the New Testament, and the call of Saint Francis in the 12th Century.

"Realizing that God initially "calls" a person to the Secular Franciscan Order, still, every person within the Order has the responsibility to nurture the genuine call. The purpose of the entire formation process is to accompany the person on his or her journey of discovery of God, discovery of St. Francis, and discovery of the individual's own call."

"Francis used the term "brothers" to refer to those men who asked to join him. Never did he refer to them as followers or sons as was the case in other religious Order. Francis wanted this group that God had set apart to be known as a family. Even the name he chose for them, the Order of Friars Minor, the Lesser Brothers, gives us an insight into how Francis viewed himself and those with him. They were not to be set above, but to be servants, following the example set by our Lord. Within their own community, no one person was to be set up above the others. the one who was to care for the others was the guardian of all that would keep them close to God. Francis chose the family as his model of relationship."

"This small band of men, this brotherhood, would be the basis for the rebuilding of the church."

How does this apply to Secular Franciscans? Well, we are brother and sister to one another. Using the example given by St. Francis, who made Christ the inspiration and center of his life, "the vocation of the SFO is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion."

Fraternity is "the basic cell of the Order, a visible sign of the Church, a supernatural reality based on the paternity of God and on the brotherhood in Jesus Christ experienced in the strength of the Holy Spirit."

"The fraternity is called upon to provide a prophetic and charismatic presence within Church and to assist in her universal mission."

"The Fraternity is a living gift which should always be carried inside oneself which is quite different from just having meeting: these only mark the rhythm of making the journey."



This paper by Fr. Samy is wonderfully written and should be read by everyone. I've just quoted a few key paragraphs, or parts thereof, so at this point we'll skip down to Section 3. "Life in Fraternity." Father continues to point out the relationship between our Rule and Life in Fraternity.

—We are a Fraternity OF LOVE

—Fraternity is the lived experience of togetherness, unity of mutual love

—Fraternity as Sacrament of Gospel Living

—an effective support system for evangelical growth;

—a productive experience of group spiritual direction;

—a context of stability for grounding and maturing Gospel values and praxis;

—a concrete, human manifestation of a deeper spiritual reality;

—a real sign of the Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation of the Reign of God.

The fourth section deals with "Fraternity a Place of Conversion." He talks about a "launching pad for apostolic activity of members."

Fifth, "The Eucharist, the center of life in Fraternity."

Sixth, "The Challenges of Fraternal Life." Father quotes Mary Ann Julian, OFS, "Our fraternities are the nurseries where God prepares nurtures, and strengthens us for our work in the world...."

This chapter on Fraternity is a wonderful contribution to the FUN Manual, and should be read by all. These few lines do not do it justice, but it's a start.

"My God and My All"

Peace and Good,

Fred Schaeffer, OFS

July 28, 2012