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## A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW

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### ARTICLES

- LIFE IN MINORITY: FROM TRANS-CULTURAL TO  
TRANS-ECONOMIC FORMATION II ..... 326  
*David B. Couturier, O.F.M. Cap*
- INGMAR BERGMAN AND THE SEARCH FOR GRECCIO ..... 334  
*Joseph Doyno, O.F.M.*
- ST. FRANCIS AS DRAMATIST AND POET ..... 339  
*Séamus Mulholland, O.F.M.*

### FEATURES

- REFLECTION: ON HOW SOME BROTHERS FROM ROME  
CELEBRATED THE ADVENT OF THE LORD  
ON AFRICAN SOIL ..... 321  
*Herman Schalück, O.F.M.*
- POETRY:  
FROM CHRISTMAS TO NEW YEAR, ..... 338  
*Hugoline A. Sabatino, O.F.M.*
- BOOK REVIEWS ..... 344
- INDEX TO THE CORD — 1988 ..... 349

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# The CORD

## A Monthly Franciscan Spiritual Review

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## Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

### I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions

BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo

CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun

EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony

EpCler: Letter to Clerics<sup>1</sup>

EpCust: Letter to Superiors<sup>1</sup>

EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful<sup>1</sup>

EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo

EpMin: Letter to a Minister

EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order

EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of People

ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God

ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father

FormViv: Form of Life for St. Clare

Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221

LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God

LaudHor: Praises at All the Hours

OffPass: Office of the Passion

OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix

RegB: Rule of 1223

RegNB: Rule of 1221

RegEr: Rule for Hermits

SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady

SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues

Test: Testament of St. Francis

UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare

VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy

<sup>1</sup>I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

### II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis

2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis

3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles

CL: Legend of Saint Clare

CP: Process of Saint Clare

Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis

LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis

LMin: Bonaventure, Minor Life of Francis

LP: Legend of Perugia

L3S: Legend of the Three Companions

SC: Sacrum commercium

SP: Mirror of Perfection

Omnibus: Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings and Early Biographies*. English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973).

AB: Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M.Cap., and Ignatius Brady, O.F.M., ed., *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

## REFLECTION:

### On How Some Brothers From Rome Celebrated the Advent of the Lord on African Soil

HERMANN SCHALÜCK, O.F.M.

As the Year of the Lord 1987 was coming to a close and while Sister Snow and Brother Wind were visiting the countries of Europe, lo there was heard in the place known as the "Curia" of the Brothers Minor the voice of one who called from beyond the desert of West Africa: "Brother John, come over and visit us" (cf. Acts 16,9). So it happened that the Minister and servant of the Brothers set out in haste, bringing with him his secretary, Bro. Peter as also Bro. Transalpinus. On the wings of brother Wind they flew noisily towards that Coast where many years ago ivory had been found. Then, on the same day on which the Church of Rome began to intone the famous O Antiphons, they set out for another country called Togo.

While the three brothers travelled through the darkness of the african night, filled with the joy which is a quality of the time preceding the feast of the Birth of the Lord, they meditated upon the experiences of hospitality, fraternity and "inculturation" — so it was called in those days — which the Lord would bestow on them on that continent.

And in their breviaries, which they always carried with them in accordance with a precept of our Rule, they found the words of Scripture which opened their hearts and eyes to the meaning of some events which the Lord, in his wisdom, had prepared for them: "Brothers, be patient until the coming of the Lord. Behold how the sower sows the precious fruits of the earth while the early and latter rain fall. Your likewise must be patient, for the coming of the Lord is nigh" (James 5, 7).

The author is a General Definitior of the Order of Friars Minor in the General Curia in Rome. Readers will find this reflection both informative and inspiring.

Enlightened and wonderfully consoled by these timely words, Bro. John and his companions set foot on that continent and from then until the Feast of the Nativity they traversed innumerable cities, villages, forests and plains known there as "sabanas." Their purpose was to see and meet the Brothers, to inform themselves on the growth and progress of the "African Project," as it is called, and what is more important, to allow their hearts to be touched and converted by the Gospel of Jesus.

First of all, the Brothers from Rome were amazed and over-joyed by the hospitality showered on them wherever they went. On arrival at any place they would give and receive the greeting of Brother Francis: "The Lord give you his peace." As they entered the churches and chapels of the various regions, they were covered with flowers by young girls who were both gracious and God-fearing. In the towns through which they passed, they were invited by the men, young and old, to take a seat beside them. Quite often they had the privilege of drinking delicious beer prepared in clay bowls from maize and millet. By way of contrast, on the occasion of another very opportune visit, an eminent Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church gave them a drink which tasted very much as if it had come from distant Scotland. And again, on another courtesy call, a certain Archbishop had killed a sheep in honour of his guests and offered them a piquant roast seasoned with rare Spanish and French wine.

So the brothers praised the Lord, asking themselves whether such african hospitality might not be a sign of the kingdom, to come, to be sure but, in fact, already present: a prelude to that promised banquet of which rich and poor. Africans and Asians, christians and muslims, men and women of other faiths, prelates and simple friars will partake on an equal footing. And wherever the three brothers set foot, be it in some elegantly rich episcopal palace, built to receive the Lord Pope during his visit of a day and a half, in the cabins of the natives or in the simple dwellings of the friars, they constantly put into practice the words of Brother Francis, when he says: "Wherever they are and in whatever place the friars meet, they should treat one another in the spirit of love and mutual honour, without murmuring" (RnB7, 15).

Thus the brothers from Rome gave thanks to the Lord for this sign of the Kingdom.

\* \* \*

Forthwith the Brother Minister wished to be better informed on the progress of "Project Africa" and of the implantation of the Fraternity in those regions. For that purpose he and his companions visited all those fraternities into which, after long years of "drought," many brothers from different tribes, nations and languages had been received. These wished to come to know our form of life and to follow out the Gospel, the Rule

and the third priority of the Six Year Plan. In all those places Bro. John celebrated a fraternal Eucharist with the candidates, explaining to each and all the commandment received from the Lord, namely, that we should be the pioneers of an inculturated fraternity, at once international and intercultural, in which all are called to be brothers and sisters under the One Lord; also that we should bestow on the universal brotherhood and on the Church those values which are characteristic of the african continent: authentic "minority" and that sense of family in which mutual respect, maternal charity and fraternal corresponsibility hold sway (cf. RB 6). In all these meetings and reunions, celebrated in various languages but in one sole spirit, all became aware that Africa was not so much a "project" of the Order as a gift and project of God for the Order, designed to inculcate in, and to recall to, the Order its catholic and apostolic character, and to grant it the gift of renewed and committed young members.

The african brothers, on their part, taught the brothers from Rome a proverb which says: "If you believe in the future, plant a tree." So while there arose from venerable curial churches of Rome the sound of the solemn and vibrant antiphon, "O Radix Jesse," the Minister General of all the Brothers decided, as a sign of his determination to implant the fraternity in a new and lasting way on african soul, to plant various trees in the brothers' garden, palms and hibiscus among others.

Meanwhile Bro. Peter and Bro. Transalpinus had to be content with planting smaller and less imposing, but not less useful, shrubs. Since it was the month of December and still a time of drought, they watered the plants generously, conscious of that other Gregorian melody which is wont to be sung in Rome: "Drop down dew, ye heavens." In addition, with a view to better representing "Project Africa" to the Brothers, on one of those days the Brother Minister decided to write an Encyclical Letter which should bear the name of another african proverb: "In order to encircle the baobab tree, many hands are needed."

So all the Brothers gave thanks to the Lord also for this sign of the kingdom.

\* \* \*

In short, the visitors had ample motives for meditating on the word "Inculturation," much used by theologians of that epoch. In all humility they were anxious to know what its meaning might be. And the Lord led them through one of those great parks where, according to the vision of the prophet, elephants, monkies, lions and gazelles lived together in peace (cf. Is. 11, 6-8), and where they might step upon serpents and vipers which were unable to do them any harm (cf. Mt. 16,21).

So they finally came upon the tribe of the MOBA in the north of the

country where a well had been sunk. A crowd of people with many animals had united for the purpose of saluting Sister Water, ever so welcome in these regions. A priest, a son of the tribe, blessed the water and explained that water is the origin of all life, that which causes the desert to bloom and the savanna to shoot forth an abundance of precious crops, maize and millet especially. Then he related the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well of Samaria (cf. Jn. 4, 5 - 45), and spoke about that water which, according to the word of the Lord Jesus, can satisfy all thirst, the water by which we must be reborn. Having said all this the priest told a woman who carried a child on her back, to take water from the well for the first time. He then blessed the water and with it sprinkled both people and animals. All present, whether christians, muslims, animists, catechumens or friars, admired this timely method of evangelization, known to some brothers in those days as "liberating and integral Evangelization."

Both in their meeting with the Poor Clare Sisters in the Capital and in their visits to numerous out-stations, the Brothers felt especially moved by the beauty of the instruments and of the african melodies and dances, to the point of forgetting, at least for the moment, the roman melodies. Full of spiritual contentment, they allowed themselves to be carried away by these dance rhythms.

In yet another capital the Brothers had the privilege of celebrating the Solemn Eucharist of the birth of the Lord, this time embellished by the gregorian melodies and by other Christmas carols brought to these shores some one hundred years ago by German missionaries. These were so familiar to Bro. Transalpinus that to his pleasant surprise he was able to sing with his brother Africans, all through Christmas Night, the carols of his beloved Saxony. Tied to the Crib were two sheep and a goat. For everybody's edification, neither did these remain silent. They finally ceased to bleat only when they had been solemnly incensed by Bro. John! Thus all recalled that night in Greccio when Bro. Francis, full of tenderness for the humanity of God, had represented for the first time in history, the birth of Jesus, poor and suffering, in the midst of his people (cf. 1 Cel. 84-86; 2 Cel. 199)

Thus all gave thanks to God for this sign of his coming.

Having come to the end of their pilgrimage, the brothers from the "General Curia," as it is called, came to realize very clearly that they had received a special grace from the Lord of Mercy in so far as they had lived through some new experiences which there would be very little chance of enjoying at the "centre," namely:

- that the same seed of the Gospel and the form of evangelical life of Brother Francis should be planted in all the continents. However,

its fruits will always be varied and distinct, producing rich tastes and odours according to time, place and temperature in zones which in Rome are still called "peripheral;"

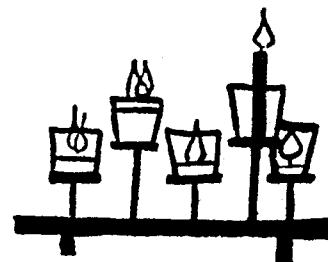
- that according to the wise words of the Lord Pope Paul VI (cf. Evangelii Nuntiandi), the "Evangelizer" must first of all be evangelized;
- that the Lord is always present when two or three or more nationalities are united in his name in one fraternity in order to plant the Gospel and cause Jesus to be born in today's world;
- that all races, tribes, tongues, religions and cultures can find a common ground in those fundamental values which the Lord instills in all people and which make possible an authentic "Inculturation" in accordance with the Gospel, to wit, mutual respect, love for life and for all creation, hospitality and the desire for peace.

So the brothers gave thanks to the Lord for these intuitions as well as for his presence among all men and women of good will.

\* \* \*

The Brother Minister and his companions returned to Rome by the same way as they had set out. They landed at the city called holy and eternal on the feast of St. Stephen, Protomartyr, replete with spiritual gifts, interiorly purified and knowing that their african brothers had confided to them the wisdom of another of their proverbs which says: "Mother dear, carry me on your back. When you are old, I will carry you."  
To the praise of Christ. Amen.

Haec omnia vidit, audivit et fideliter conscripsit frater Hermannus Transalpinus in die Octavae Nativitatis Domini, 1.1.1988



## Life in Minority: from Trans-cultural to Trans-economic Formation II

DAVID B. COUTURIER, O.F.M., CAP.

In the first part of this article, I argued that the peculiar challenge facing Western religious formation at this time is the movement from trans-cultural to trans-economic formation. The change in the incidence and the quality of poverty in the world today necessitates a basic re-orientation of economic priorities and a conversion of our economic structures. To accomplish this we must develop, according to the recent teaching of John Paul II, the virtue of solidarity. The particular entrance of Franciscans into the mystery of solidarity is minority. However, as I tried to show in the first part of this article, contemporary research on vocationers indicates a dimension of resistances to this kind of minority which has been rarely studied before now. In this article, I would like to address myself to formators interested in moving young religious toward the development of a worldview which is more minority-focused and more sensitive to the real condition and needs of the poor both in our country and in the world. As indicated in the first article, the challenge we are facing goes beyond the crossing of cultural lines and learning new languages. The real challenge facing us is the movement across economic barriers into an effective solidarity with the poor in their economic world. The task is to help conduct our brothers and sisters from one horizon of learning (in their economic class of origin) to another (their new economic class of solidarity). What do we know so far about this kind of transition?

One of the strongest and, I believe, least tested notions current in religious formation today is the one that implies that giving a person a provocative or shocking pastoral experience will, in and of itself, lead to vocational maturity, growth and pastoral insight. And so, in an attempt

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*Part One of this article by the Capuchin psychologist appeared in the November issue of THE CORD. All members of the Franciscan family and especially those engaged in the ministry of formation will find the complete article of great benefit.*

to set a new course for religious formation or because we are faced with an individual who seems intransigent to traditional formational initiatives, we set up (and with some frequency) a whole host of "shocking" pastoral experiences for them to go through. We hope that the inner city, the Third World, a rural parish, a sensitive pastor, a challenging DRE, a quiet neighborhood, a multi-ethnic environment, learning a new language, studying local customs will somehow shake this individual from formational lethargy. Before long, our formation programs become an endless series of experiences, showing very little coherence one to the other, with little tangible results, almost no research, and higher and higher costs.

Research conducted at the Institute of Psychology in Rome indicates that experimenting with various pastoral roles has little positive effect (and perhaps even some damaging effects) *unless* the individual's intrapsychic dynamics are disposed already to learn from experimentation with various pastoral roles.<sup>1</sup> What this means is that vocational maturity is dependent not so much on the practice that one gets from different pastoral roles as on the capacity of the individual to learn and to profit from the pastoral roles provided. What is needed is a clear emotional, cognitive proportionate *fit* between the role to be assumed and the individual's capacity to learn from this particular role. This capacity to profit from pastoral roles is linked directly to the balance of inconsistencies and consistencies in the personality.

Furthermore, if this practice of pastoral roles is not based on a pre-existing capacity to internalize values, not only will it not have any tangible effect on the development of vocational maturity, it may actually compound an already difficult situation. In this way: the person will of necessity continue to rely on vocational roles (outside situations, persons and circumstances) for self-fulfillment rather than on the strength of his or her internalized values. This reliance on the strength of vocational circumstances means that the locus of control and responsibility remains outside of oneself. This can lead to the familiar situation encountered by religious superiors over and over again — the entrenched minister who cannot be moved because service of the kingdom of God has been equated with a particular job, role or position in the Church.

It is not enough to provide vocationers with better field placements. Justice is not arrived at simply by being exposed to shocking pastoral situations. Formation for solidarity with the poor must include, among other things, an opening up of the individual's *readiness for learning* which, as we have seen, is for a good number of people in formation frozen by unconscious inconsistencies in the personality.

Formation personnel can be of great service to their brothers and sisters by becoming more sensitive to the way that self-transcendent values (such

as solidarity and minority) and dissonant needs (for aggression and domination) interact in the life experiences of those they are called to serve. We must begin to see how values for humanitarian service and love of neighbor collide with needs for abasement, aggression, domination of others and harm avoidance.

What is needed is not a new pastoral placement but a new horizon of learning. But, research is mounting that pastoral ministers are having a more and more difficult time adjusting to the new challenges facing them in ministry. Two years ago, the rectors of major seminaries in the Midwest got together at a conference to talk about the growing crisis of disillusionment and burn-out among newly ordained priests. They expressed their concern over the growing number of young priests who, within one or two years of pastoral ministry, find themselves isolated, disillusioned, burned out or on the way out of ministry.

E. L. Mickan, in a recent study in the *Australian and New Zealand Theological Review*, wrote about the phenomenon of *transitional disillusionment* facing young ministers as they try to cope with the enormous differences between the horizon of learning and ideals expressed in theological schools and the horizon of learning and ideals which meet them in their local pastoral assignments.<sup>2</sup>

Mickan found that some ministers do well and integrate what they have learned in theology with the needs and problems of the local situation. But, a growing number of ministers either ignore what they have learned, go native and offer their communities nothing more than a mirrored reflection of where they are at already (offering support but no challenge) or they hammer the vision expressed in learned texts without integrating them to the difficult and lively pastoral circumstances of the parish. Whether they get lost in the practical details of pastoral life or lost in the theological concepts of pastoral vision, over time these ministers develop an increasing sense of disillusionment. For some ministers, the discrepancy between ecclesial vision and ecclesial reality is too great. They opt out and become pastoral loners who neither challenge themselves nor others to grow anymore. They are simply biding their time.

Again, I think it should be clear that moving from one horizon of learning to another is not automatic. If it is so difficult for young, dedicated and vibrant people to move from schools of theology to pastoral placements, we should not be too quick to presume that individuals can automatically move from the horizon of learning and expectations developed in their economic class of origin to that horizon of learning and expectations in their economic class of solidarity. Solidarity with the poor across class lines will entail learning a whole new set of social boundaries and norms. Power relationships are different when one is sitting in the

last rather than the front seat! In short, trans-economic formation must confront the problematics involved in the transition from one horizon of learning to another. Failure to recognize those dynamics of transition will result in increased levels of disillusionment and stress among vocationers.

Let us now consider some of the elements that might make up a psycho-spiritual pedagogy of minority. I believe that there are four steps which need to be taken with each individual who wishes to develop a new social imagination of Franciscan minority.

### Step One: The Assessment of the Intrapsychic Capacity for Franciscan Minority

As we have seen throughout this essay, the vocational capacity for solidarity with the poor and a social imagination that is minority focused cannot be presumed simply because a person enters a Franciscan community. High vocational ideals and proclaimed values of social compassion reveal only a partial picture of the total motivational dynamic in an individual's life. Beyond these are specific complexes of emotional needs of which the vast majority of entering vocationers are only vaguely aware of in their personality. It is important that each vocationer be assessed for the particular and unique interaction between values and needs from the perspective of Franciscan minority. There will be no lasting and effective solidarity with the poor until individuals are helped to free themselves a bit more from their unconscious tendencies to consolidate solidarities with their archaic needs. I believe that there are three parts to this first step.

(1) The assessment of *proclaimed values for solidarity and minority* in the individual. Formators should be able to distinguish between proclaimed values which are natural, those which are psychosocial, and those which are theocentrically self-transcendent.<sup>3</sup>

If the range of a person's professed values reaches no further than self-centered concerns for security, achievement or being sociable to others, we should not expect any further self-motivated operationalization of effective solidarity with the poor or Franciscan minority. Franciscan minority confronts the values embedded in what has been called a "culture of narcissism."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, we cannot presume that all professed values are religious in orientation.

(2) The assessment of *conscious and subconscious needs* which might interfere with the living out of Franciscan minority. Each of us grows up and develops a unique complex of personal needs, some of which are conscious and some of which are unconscious; all of which are operative. We should be able to name as early on in formation work as possible what are the particularly *dissonant needs* in the personality of our brother or

sister which makes living in minority extremely difficult or threatening. For example, a person who has been emotionally abused as a child and comes to religious life unknowingly starving for attention and affection, will not spontaneously seek out moments for taking the last place. Especially when the needs are unrecognized but still operative, the individual will resist any attempts by life to aggravate what is already an emotionally starving interior life. More often than not, these individuals will begin to compensate for their brokenness and seek the community's tacit permission for such consolation.

It is clear that simply emphasizing cognitive values of minority will have minimal positive effect on these individuals. First of all, they may already know and accept these self-transcendent values as primary motivators in their religious life. But, more importantly, it is often the case that the problem is not at the level of beliefs or values. The problem resides in the area of emotional dissonance. For that reason, classes on social justice will develop insight but will fail to provide a sufficient impetus for consistent change. What is needed is some resolution of the interior struggle going on between proclaimed values and unrecognized needs.

There is no getting around the fact that each individual develops a unique social imagination (expressing a unique horizon of values, attitudes and needs). For that reason, attention must be paid to each individual's construction of social expectations and the symbols which represent them in the day to day traffic of human interchange.

(3) The third part of this first step is the development of an *effective solidarity with the formator*. Because the development of a social imagination is unique to each individual and because we can so easily defend ourselves against threats to our preferred horizon of expectations, we need to be with one other person who can help us to face the transition from old ways of seeing our world to new, more Gospel-oriented ways of seeing our world. This effective solidarity must be directed towards awareness, acceptance and change. First, this formational solidarity allows the individual the time and space to get to know himself or herself (and all of the self). Here, like Francis in the cave or on the road with the leper, the individual finally meets themselves in a more comprehensive and less defensive manner. They confront the worldview they have constructed for themselves and the protection and comfort that it provides them. They also recognize some of the damage which this limited worldview has caused in their interpersonal world.

Secondly, this formational solidarity provides an opportunity for the individual to *accept* himself or herself (including the less favorable parts of the self). The unconditional positive regard of the formator when matched with the formator's sensitive understanding of the centrality of

Franciscan values provides the vocationer with a "zone of safety" in which to come to loving terms with one's actual stance in the world.

Finally, this formational solidarity encourages the individual to make changes in the direction of Franciscan minority. The solidarity with the formator provides a crucial locus of insight and testing for individuals who must learn what it means to empty oneself out more deeply for the sake of the kingdom.

This effective solidarity with the formator is an essential ingredient for formational growth. Over and over again, both formator and vocationer confront the challenge of breaking through the psychic numbing which keeps us from recognizing the true condition of poverty around us. Life experiences, as the intersection of proclaimed values and emotional needs, are the subject for this solidarity. Individuals will continue to need some help in recognizing which actions in their ministry are truly a solidarity with the poor and which ones are still a solidarity with archaic needs.

Once an individual has strengthened this basic capacity for internalization of Franciscan minority, he or she is ready to move to the next three steps in the development of a social imagination of Franciscan minority. These next steps are predicated on the successful resolution of basic inconsistencies in the vocational personality. If a person has not successfully negotiated this first step, the following three steps will be nothing more than intellectual exercises which provide some cognitive stimulation but little internalization.

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*... the vocational capacity for solidarity with the poor and a social imagination that is minority focused cannot be presumed simply because a person enters a Franciscan community.*

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#### Step Two: The Development of Founder-Shock

This formational step seeks to develop in the individual a systematic and critical awareness of the gap which exists between the social imagination of Francis and the social imagination of his contemporaries. We seek to develop in vocationers a sensitivity to the critical distance which existed between Francis' lived Gospel experience of peace and brotherhood and

his contemporaries' lived experience of wealth and violence. Here, vocationers are introduced to the dynamics of our founding Franciscan mythology.<sup>5</sup> At this point, vocationers enter more deeply into the world of Francis (through historical analysis) and recognize how shocking his message of peace and brotherhood were to an age steeped in bloody, feudal conflict. They come to recognize how dynamic theological principles and values shape a religious imagination that is truly prophetic and transformative.

### Step Three: The Development of World-Shock

A contemporary social imagination of minority cannot remain in the thirteenth century. It must understand and confront the ethical challenges of our own "structures of sin." It is important, therefore, that vocationers develop a "world shock" — a critical awareness of the gap which exists between the social imagination (horizon of expectations) contained in the parables of Jesus and the message of Francis and the social imagination (horizon of expectations) of our own times (i. e. violence, wealth, hyper-individualism, secularism). The techniques of social analysis and a critical reflection on our socio-economic condition are critical tools for the development of this development of world-shock.<sup>6</sup>

### Step four: The Development of Congregation-Shock

One of the most critical and yet least studied areas of religious imagination is the analysis of the forces which keep religious congregations in a state of psychic numbing in regard to the condition of poverty in the world. The work of Gerald Arbuckle and others on the refounding of religious life provides an important new tool for the construction of a critical awareness of the gap which exists between the social imagination of minority in Francis and our own lived social imagination of minority in community life.<sup>7</sup> With the tools of family systems theory, we might begin to understand how we come together as a community and construct a horizon of expectations, rules, roles and defenses which obscure a deeper commitment to the concerns of those who are marginalized in our society.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

The challenge of religious formation today is to develop in our brothers and sisters a new social imagination less tied to the violence, hyper-individualism and class structures of our era and more consonant with the social imagination of minority expressed in the parables of Jesus and the life of Francis.

Present research indicates that entering religious have already constructed a social imagination which protects, at least in part, certain underlying defensive needs which they have. An understanding of the complex dynamics involved in the collision of transcendent values and dissonant personal needs and a clearer pedagogy of Franciscan minority is essential if we are to have any substantive impact on our times and develop that marvellous spirituality of solidarity which John Paul II is calling us to.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of this point, cf. Luigi M. Rulla, Joyce Ridick, and Franco Imoda, *Entering and Leaving Vocation: Interpsychic Dynamics*. Rome: Gregorian University Press, 1976, 233 - 247.

<sup>2</sup>E. L. DeFinance, "La hierarchie des valeurs," in World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies, *The Mediation of Christian Values*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America. (in press).

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Lash, *The Culture of Narcissism*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1979.

<sup>4</sup>For a discussion of the contemporary crisis in religious life concerning founding mythologies, cf. Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Strategies for Growth In Religious Life*. New York: Alba House, 1987. John R. Rathschmidt provides an interesting socio-phenomenological reading of Franciscan founding mythology in his "The Embrace of Radical Poverty: Roots of Franciscan Mission," in R. Bechtel and J. Rathschmidt, eds. *Mission and Mysticism*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Maryknoll Press, 1987, 97 - 116.

<sup>5</sup>Joseph Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*. Washington, D.C.: Center for Concern, 1980.

<sup>6</sup>Arbuckle, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup>Alan S. Gurman and David P. Kniskern, eds. *Handbook of Family Therapy*. New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1981.





## Ingmar Bergman and the Search for Greccio

JOSEPH DOINO, O.F.M.

One would wonder, and rightfully so, what possible connection could exist between a world-reknown Swedish film-director and the name that immediately awakens so many simple and powerful images in the Franciscan memory. The story of Francis' Christmas celebration that brought unusual light to the darkness of a cave, and more so to the darkness of human hearts, seems worlds apart from the deep, probing films one usually associates with Ingmar Bergman. However, the last of his many highly acclaimed films, *Fanny and Alexander*, is a kind of final statement of the great Swedish director and it does awaken special Franciscan interest because the symbol that seems to control its exploration of the great human issues of life and death, of hope and despair, of light and darkness, is the great feast of the Lord's birth.

This typically imaginative work of the provocative film-maker seems to direct its cinematographic powers from beginning to end toward engaging the viewer, both visibly and ideologically, on the level of the Christmas theme. Like Greccio, it speaks a powerful message regarding the impact of the Incarnation upon the Christian imagination and its perceptions of reality. Unlike Greccio, the world of the ten year old Alexander and his younger sister, for all of its festivity and flights of the imagination, suggests a perception of the Christmas story that somehow reduces God's awesome embrace of human and cosmic reality to the artificial. And out of that artificiality emerges a strange feeling that for all of its external symbols of celebration, life for this small town theatre family of the early nineteen hundred has never ceased to be just that — theatre; and bad theatre at that. Simply put, the celebration of Christmas at the home of the matriarch of this family cannot but strike the Franciscan viewer in an unusual way.

The film opens on the afternoon of Christmas eve with the family theatre's traditional presentation of *The Play about the Joyful Birth of Christ*. As the action moves from the theatre to the festive family celeb-

ration, one wonders whether this title is confined to the theatre. Could Bergman be suggesting that life in the world of Fanny and Alexander is nothing but a continuation of the play? It would seem so. In fact, as often as references to the Incarnation occur in the play, the lingering impression is that the joy inspired by the birth of Christ is itself a stage-production. True joy never really invades the world of a ten year old boy and his younger sister.

Alexander is a sensitive and imaginative child who resonates unusually to the many and varied sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touches of his circumscribed world, especially those special to Christmas. He has a natural talent and penchant for theatre and for the theatric as did Francis. His imagination, however, is almost capricious and he is readily attracted to whatever will allow him to engage in flights of fancy. Reality does attract him but rather than enjoy its simply being there it serves him as an occasion for escape into strange fantasies. There is no real wonder, real mystery, real awe. All is *Dream Play*, the title of a play Alexander's grandmother Helena reads to him as he rests his head on her lap. This final image of Bergman's film strengthens the impression that the future harbors further outlandish nightmares for this young boy who is committed to keeping the family theatre going into the third generation. The Christmas story, one feels, will be forever confined to stage and artificial lighting: it will have no effect on the meaning of life.

"Everything is acting," says Helena, the matriarch of the theatre family, and this best crystalizes the empty show that results from a failure to encounter the birth of Christ on the deep level of faith. For all of the family ritual, its Christmas sights, sounds, smells, touches and tastes, one could never imagine any of the gathered celebrants entertaining in any way whatsoever. Bonaventure's invitation in the *Tree of Life*: "... embrace that divine manger; press your lips upon and kiss the boy's feet. Then in your mind keep the shepherds' watch, marvel at the assembling host of angels, join in the heavenly melody..."<sup>1</sup> Even their practice of listening to a reading of the Christmas gospel seems to be empty ritual. There is little to suggest that they live from the conviction that our humanity and our history have been indeed radically embraced by our loving God. So there is no power to enable them to move beyond the limited perspectives of magic, play acting, art for its own sake. There is no such thing as "a pervasive realism, a tender earthiness in all its characters, and a sometimes ironical appreciation of their existence at their age in that spot on earth in that period of cultural and historical determination."<sup>2</sup> The Incarnation does not lead Bergman's characters to a trusting encounter with reality. Rather, they overplay it: sex, family relationships, children's games, food, dance, family rituals. Even the bishop, the hated stepfather of Fanny and

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Alexander, must say to them: "I love you but my love is strong and harsh." God's play in the mysteries of creation and incarnation creates no space in the bishop's world for joyful celebration. Certainly one could never imagine him picking up two sticks and moving one over the other like Francis, as if playing a violin.

If the home of Alexander's grandmother turns the birth of Jesus into bad theatre, that of the bishop removes it so far from the human world as to make life a grim submission to a God totally without compassion and mercy. Love is mimed in both homes. There are no memorable images of true human enjoyment. The final communal celebration, a christening, evokes neither joy nor hope; the newly born child will enter the make-believe world of those standing about. Baptism into Christ will in no way change one's perception of the realities of love and death.

What is the crucial statement Bergman seems to make in and through his final film? There is real significance in the fact that he selects the birth of Christ as a controlling symbol in this unusual family drama. The issues of love and pretense, imagination and fantasy, reality and artificiality, true celebration and empty ritual, real hope and useless escape, cheap and costly grace — are all played out against the backdrop of the feast of the Incarnation. Like Francis, Bergman seems to be telling us that only an imagination that is illumined by the burning torches of Greccio can find the power to "sing" reality even in the midst of suffering and pain. The make-believe aspects of Francis' Christmas celebration paradoxically lead to a heightened experience of the real. But it is the make-believe of the Christian imagination that is rooted in an extraordinary conviction that God has in fact taken our humanity and our history as his own. The make-believe of Alexander's imagination, the product and symbol of his supposedly Christian environment, leads to a world of false hopes, illusions, the fear of death and a fatalism regarding life. *The Play about the Joyful Birth of Christ* will continue to be performed in the family's theatre: but it will remain just that — theatre. The story will be correct, the script will speak of joy and mercy, of light and radiance, but it will never get beyond the confines of the stage. Is Bergman suggesting by a negative argument what Francis intuited so positively? Is he possible saying that one can only truly perceive and experience reality in its richness, one can only truly dream dreams and see visions, one can truly experience the depth of the mystery of human life only when one, like Francis, has surrendered to the "sublime humility and humble sublimity" of the joyful birth of Christ?

As Franciscans we must face the question of Greccio's impact upon our experience of reality. Or better, how much does my faith in the birth of the Lord effect my perception of the human, of the world, of God? Greccio

can become empty theatre for us and be robbed of the incredible impact that we can share with those who witnessed that remarkable celebration. Thomas of Celano tells us in his *First Life* (85) that those who came to Greccio "were filled with new joy over the new mystery." It was through Francis that the Child Jesus "was brought to life again .... and stamped upon their fervent memory." (1 Cel 86). Giotto depicts the event in one of the frescoes in the Basilica of Saint Francis in Assisi. The scene is one of peace and reconciliation, of awe and simplicity: men and women, singing friars and diocesan clergy, even live animals and hay, are there with Francis before the crib and the viewer is made to feel that in the midst of this the richness and beauty of life have been rediscovered. What Bonaventure describes as a "venerable night rendered brilliant and solemn by a multitude of bright lights and by resonant and harmonious hymns of praise"<sup>3</sup> is given feeling and life in Giotto's magnificent painting. It is that feeling and life that are so suffocated by the empty ritual that pervades the world of Bergman's characters.

There is certainly much more that can be said and has been said regarding the message of *Fanny and Alexander*.<sup>4</sup> I would claim, however, that for Bergman as for Francis, our perception of reality, our ability to live joyfully and truthfully within the circumscribed world of time and space, our ability to commit ourselves to the search for value and meaning even in the midst of pain and suffering, — these and much more can only occur in the hearts of those who have surrendered themselves in word and deed to *The Play about the Joyful Birth of Christ*. Bergman and Greccio are really not that far apart.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Bonaventure: *The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis*. Translation and Introduction by Ewert Cousins. New York: Paulist Press, 1978, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Erik H. Erikson, "Dr. Borg's Life cycle" in *Daedalus*, Spring 1976, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Cousins, *ibid.* p. 278.

<sup>4</sup>For a fine review of the film see, "Fanny and Alexander," Barbara and Leonard Quart, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, (1983) pp. 22 - 27.



## From Christmas to New Year

Evergreen shrubbery  
in a rural graveyard  
sways restfully alert  
'neath the pine tree.  
Ivy, turned darksome for Winter,  
wreathes upright slabs  
where the world of our childhood  
nestles  
preparing us as ever  
a cradle.  
Boughs burnished with frozen snowdust  
are hung with cones,  
the concentrate of Autumn's cornucopia  
and the hope of Spring shoots.  
Squirrels entwine the tree  
with their garland of tails.  
Holly berries bead on the surface  
while root-level sap  
stores generations' distillation.  
All-year sparrows  
ruffle against the cold  
with auburn parkas.  
Then a cardinal may alight  
flutter and settle  
in portrayal of our heart.  
Catchall crèche,  
at year's end,  
of images.  
Spadework for tomorrow.  
Star silver  
illuminates a fir-tree nocturne  
at whose base there await us  
gift-wrapped lives.

Here Christmas has crystallized its Joy.  
From the depth that we lie  
to that height will we rise:  
We are what we remember.

*Hugoline A. Sabatino, O.F.M.*

## St. Francis As Dramatist and Poet

**SÉAMUS MULHOLLAND, O.F.M.**

As a poet I am keenly interested in the way in which St. Francis perceived the world, how he expressed in word and deed his experience of that world, and how, with his poetical mind, he translated inter-active experience into the concrete and the visual. This has led me increasingly to look at St. Francis as a 'dramatist,' one who takes the abstract or conceptual and crafts from it a visible experience and expression in word and deed so that the abstract becomes enfleshed and the drama itself becomes the experience.

Recently, I took a group of 14 year olds from our local Youth Centre here in East London to the Cockpit Theatre (a theatre designed and specially built for Youth Theatre) where they were to perform their one act play "*Leaving Home*". The youthfulness of the players was more than made up for by the confidence and surety with which they acted and expressed their experience of the world of East London, which is a hard, tough inner-city area with the problems associated with such areas: high unemployment, drug abuse, local government spending cuts, inadequate housing etc., racism and so the list goes on. The play concerned the breakdown in family relationships between the teenage daughter of an alcoholic mother; it involved the sons of the family in trouble with the Police, as well as the problems of the elderly depicted in a marvellously accurate portrayal of the grandmother.

The accuracy of observation and the naturalness of their acting, combined with a first-hand experience of what they were "fictionally" portraying, brought them massive acclaim, applause and encouragement to con-

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*Besides his ministry in London's East End, Fr. Séamus writes poetry, produces plays and composes music for a folkband. He has contributed poems and articles to The Cord.*

tinue dramatizing their experience of the world as 14 year olds. There was no sense of shame in the children about being who they were or what they were, nor was there any sense of shame or guilt about the way in which they showed what was obviously their own family experiences. Indeed when I was directing and producing the play one of the girls (who played the alcoholic mother) spoke with a stage Irish accent. When I pointed out to her that she might be guilty of a little racist stereotyping she replied, in all innocence, "But Father, my Mum's Irish and she's an alcoholic!" It was this sense of experience and the truth of it for them coupled with the truthfulness in which they acted it out for strangers that forced me to reflect upon the way in which St. Francis was in a sense actor and dramatist — for he too "acted" out the experience of his world, time and culture and the problems within it, with truthfulness and integrity.

This does not mean that Francis was insincere — of course he was not — but he did have a powerful sense of imagination, or rather his intuitive imaginative response to thought, feeling and experience provided him with a "poietas," a method of crafting, of making visible in concrete actions what was originally unformulated abstractions. It is this true imagination which in a sense sets his dramatic expression of these experiences free from the confines of pure thought, or better still, which does not limit the experiences to speculative metaphysical reflections. In the case of Francis, Marx's dictum "Do not contemplate the world, Change it!" is most obviously true; for Francis not only changes his own world, the world of his imagination, action, reflection and inner space but through his own changing, changes the world around him.

This dramatic approach to God, creation, his own culture and the Church brings from Francis expressions in concrete forms of experiences which need to be visualized. Drama exists not only as a vehicle for a particular playwright to share his thoughts and vision of the word, but also to present in 3D that experience as objectivity to the subjectivity of the audience who watches — drama, like poetry, is objective in form and function. The creative imagination of Francis is itself objective in form and function, rooted in the subjectivity of his own experience and made visible in word (his poetry and writings) and action (Greccio, the wolf of Gubbio, the removal of his clothes before the Bishop and his Father).

As poet, Francis is eloquent and articulate, his poetry reflecting his experience of contemplation yet also having within it a pragmatic dimension, for the Canticle was used by Francis to bring visible peace between the bishop and the Podestà of Assisi. As dramatist, Francis' actions, objectified from subjective experience makes his life a riveting fascination.

Anyone who has been held spellbound by an actor on stage will understand how his every action is watched, appreciated and applauded, how his every word is taken as gospel as from some Oracle at Delphi and how the actor ceases to be actor and becomes in actuality and in conceptuality that which he acts, to the extent that one forgets one is watching a "fiction" and unconsciously accepts the fiction as fact.

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*The creative imagination of Francis is itself objective in form and function, rooted in the subjectivity of his own experience and made visible in word (his poetry and writings and action. ...*

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In the same way Francis' actions, words and every movement become a "fact" within a fiction — the fiction is the powerful imaginative response and the fact the externalising of fiction. In this sense the dramatic representation of the Bethlehem event at Greccio is all at once both fact and fiction — it is in the best sense a "poietas," a crafting, a making and also in the best sense it is "drama," a play written by a master playwright of imaginative depth and perception. Francis takes a fact — the birth of Christ — and reflects upon it; he then moves the fact from the realm of the factual to the imaginatival fictional — the representation of the birth and all that surrounded it — by presenting a 3D objectivity in the cattle, straw, people etc., who are all at once actors and audience. He successfully blends to the point of non-recognition fact into fiction and vice versa, so that, like the actor above, conceptuality becomes actuality.

In the same way that Francis is a "dramatist" so too is he a most convincing "actor." By this I do not mean that the words and actions of St. Francis are untrue or lack integrity — they most certainly are true and unaffected. They are genuine because they are his and no one else's and are therefore integral to the wholeness of his personhood. What I mean by saying that Francis is a convincing actor is that in all his "actions" he becomes actuality — becomes what he "acts," he becomes peace, he becomes fraternity, he becomes poverty to the extent the the fiction (i.e. the objective externals) become the fact (i. e. the subjective experienced and expressed). The life of Francis is all dramatic and poetic: it is dramatic

because the events which shape his life are "dramatic" i.e. his initial conversion, the God-Francis dialogue at Damiano, the founding of the Order, La Verna. These are unquestionably unique experiences which are not ordinary in the sense that they are everyday events. They are dramatically decisive: they provide in a way the stage, setting and backdrop to how the visible drama of Francis' life is lived out — they are within the context the objective fiction which Francis reflects upon and in his expression of their effect upon him they become the subjective fact lived out in history in a factual life.

Before everyone rushes to contest the "fact" of the encounters with the Lord that Francis had and which I have referred to as "fiction" I do not mean that they did not happen; I accept and believe that they did, but they happened because Francis showed us that they happened in the way in which he responded to them and changed direction according to each of those dramatic encounters. The "poetic" dimension of Francis' life is not found simply in his writings in either prose or poetry but on a much deeper level. Poetry exists to present verbal ikons to the reader or listener. It is an art which uses imagination and concretization to present those images and as it presents the images in its particular form i.e. words within rhythm, rhyme, stanza etc., the words themselves are subjugated to the imaginary content which in turn moves beyond the imaginary to become symbol. Here the symbol acts upon the un conspicuous psyche feeding it, sustaining and helping it to grow so that wholeness and integrity are brought about unconsciously.

Francis' combination of dramatic and poetic through the subjectifying of objectivity means that what is presented for our audition and visual appreciation is on the one hand unsentimental but yet intensely moving in its honesty, integrity and totality. For example, I am a great fan of Humphrey Bogart and for me he can do no wrong. I do not think he was great as an actor but he was great as a dramatist. His every laconic smile, laugh or movement can spellbind the fan to the extent that one fails to see Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade or Rick in "*Casablanca*" — one simply sees Sam Spade attempting to work his way through the deviousness of Mary Astor or Sidney Greenstreet, or Rick at last understanding that sometimes to understand what it means to love one must sacrifice freely that which is loved, and so he tells Elsa to get on the plane which will take her away from him for ever. In much the same way Francis' actions are not separate from himself: they are not what he *does* but rather they are what he *is*. In the imagination that brings a picture of him to our minds as we read his writings, poetry or stories concerning him, he is the sum total of his actions and words — the fiction becomes the fact and thus the imaginary becomes reality.

It is this continuing movement between "fiction" and "fact" this "poietas" of dramatizing that ensures that Francis' actions and words will be enduring for ever. Further, it ensures that the image — the poetic ikon of Francis will be as lasting as any of the great figures of poetry, art or literature: for as Vladimir and Estragon have been waiting for Godot since Beckett first wrote the play, so too will they be waiting for Godot for eternity. As Michelangelo's Madonna will forever cradle the dead Christ of the "Pieta," and Shakespeare's Caesar is urged not to go to the Capitol and to Beware the Ides of March — or that Eliot's Waste Land for ever remains here and barren, or Yeat's 1916 for ever be the birth of a terrible beauty — so too will Francis of Assisi be the talker to animals, the inventor of the Crib, the healer of the conflict between the bishop and the mayor, or the townspeople of Gubbio and the Wolf.

As a poetic and dramatic figure the uniqueness of Francis lies in his totality of actualizing objective fiction to express subjective fact. His quality as a dramatist is the sincerity and genuine integrity of his conviction that the experiences he underwent were such that his life could never be the same. The life of St. Francis of Assisi as he plays it out is not only powerful drama, or profound imagist/ symbolist poetry, it is all of these at once and more — it is in microcosm what openness and truthfulness can be made to become and that is Alter Christus — the greatest of the Poet — Dramatists.

*The staff of the Franciscan Institute  
joins the Editors  
in wishing you a very blessed Christmas  
and every grace and good  
from our heavenly Father  
throughout the new year.*

## Book Reviews

**From Intuition to Institution: The Franciscans.** By Theophile Desbonnets. Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press. 1988. v + 155 pp. \$12.00 (cloth).

*Reviewed by Fr. Dominic Monti, O.F.M., Ph.D. (University of Chicago), Professor of Church History Washington Theological Union, Summer Professor Franciscan Institute.*

As someone who has to teach a survey of Franciscan history, I avidly delved into this contribution by the prominent editor of medieval Franciscan sources Theophile Desbonnets. The book first appeared in French in 1983; although over the past several years I have had occasion to refer to it briefly, I welcomed this translation as an opportunity to go through the whole work more carefully. After completing it, I must confess my reaction alternates between enthusiasm and exasperation.

Let me say that I am very enthused to see a book like this: a concise attempt to illustrate how the initial vision of Francis and his first few companions ("intuition") evolved into a prominent, highly structured religious order of 30,000 men ("institution") — all in the incredibly brief period of fifty years. But what was obscured in the process? Desbonnets rightly sees the story of the evolution of the Friars Minor in the thirteenth century as probably the most dramatic example in the long history of the church of how a vibrant intuition

became institutionalized (for good or ill). He calls us to recognize this process for what it was so that we might be better able to grasp again the initial vision. After all, the structures of any religious order arise out of an attempt to express and guard its inner charism. What might have been a valid expression seven hundred years ago may well no longer be so today. Hence, the ever-present call to renewal demands that we break out of encrusted habits and attempt to recover the originating charism which gave rise to those structures in the first place. That is the reason for this little book.

Yet while going through this story, I often found myself exasperated by the author's exaggerated judgments. It might have spared myself some of this reaction if I had looked first at his concluding chapter. There, after characterizing many histories of the Order as pious institutional self-justifications, Desbonnets confesses that his own book too "has not been a venture in objective history" (p. 136). He is certainly correct. It is an exercise in what the French would call *parti pris* — and at which they excel: a passionate attempt to justify a preconceived image of the way things should be (or, in this case, the way things were). Unfortunately, this approach often generates more heat than light.

The author states at the outset that describing the process of the institutionalization of the Franciscan movement cannot be "a matter of op-

posing intuition to institution, since this would be an abusive simplification" (p. 1). However, he goes on again and again to do precisely that, pitting them against one another as mutually opposing realities. This tendency leads Desbonnets to violate another of his own principles. He claims that the work of the historian demands "both justice and charity" (p. 135). But his black-and-white view of Franciscan history leads him to use such loaded terms as "betrayal" and "insidious" when assessing the motives of some of the principal characters in the story — hardly charitable, nor does it do justice to a complex reality.

The reason for this, I believe, is Desbonnets' reluctance to follow his own announced method: "we have to distinguish the institution properly speaking, i.e. following in the footsteps of Christ, from its concrete manifestations that can be either essential or non-essential in nature" (p. 135). Instead, he continually identifies Francis' intuition with its earliest expression. This makes it very difficult for him to see later developments in any other way than a sad abandonment of the pristine form, rather than as attempts to express that same intuition in changed circumstances. Nor can he admit the possibility that Francis' intuition itself might have undergone a certain refinement or clarification over the years. It seems to be frozen in 1209.

The prime example of all of this is Desbonnets' dichotomy between "fraternity" and "order": Francis wanted a brotherhood; he opposed the friars' becoming an order to the bitter end. There is certainly no doubt that Francis founded a brotherhood of penitents; there is also no doubt that as it expanded and demanded more institu-

tional forms, Francis strongly rejected the idea that his fraternity assimilate itself to the pattern of existing forms of religious life.

But a good case can be made, contrary to Desbonnets, that Francis wanted his brotherhood to be recognized as its own unique "religio" — an approved way of religious life within the church. Brotherhood ("fraternitas") cannot be totally set against order ("religio"). Desbonnets neglects to mention that the Humiliati — a brotherhood — were recognized by the church as a canonical order in 1201. The church saw Francis as the founder of such a "religio" at least from 1216 (to judge from Jacques de Vitry); the first papal bull dealing with the friars refers to them as a "religio" in 1219. Francis himself can refer to his community as *both* a "religio" and a "brotherhood" in the 1221 version of the Rule. The terms apparently were not mutually opposed to him. The Francis of 1223 that Desbonnets paints — as being "the only one" (!) left among the friars opposing a definitive canonical recognition of the Brotherhood — is a figment of an overly romantic imagination. It belongs in Kazantzakis's novel, not an historical essay.

My feelings of frustration were not helped by a very poor translation of the last five chapters. The meaning of phrases is often distorted, sometimes totally contrary to the French original. The most glaring example: "The friars inquired if they would be under obligation to observe the *Testament*" is translated "the friars demanded that they would be under obligation..."! "Guardian" comes out as "doorkeeper;" "Clares" as "Claretians."

Despite these reservations, Desbonnets gives us a challenging (if partisan) portrayal of a critical period of Francis-

can history. He challenges us to free ourselves from past institutions to experience the continual newness of intuition.

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**The Narrow Gate.** By Dom Francis Byrne, O.S.B. Spectrum Publications, P. O. Box 75, Richmond, Victoria 3121. 1987, pp. 87, no price given.

*Reviewed by Sr. Marie Francis Gallagher, O.S.F. Sister is presently working with the poor in the Ministry of Caring in Wilmington, Delaware.*

Whenever I pick up a new book, I feel it, I look carefully at the pictures, read the introduction and try to find out what the author is all about. The title intrigues me, and as I read *The Narrow Gate* I thought of the Scripture text: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." (Matt. 7:13, 14).

On the cover, there are figures of men and women whose faces are long and thin, some eyes are reading from an open book, and others are turned toward the sky. Expressions are frightened and poignant.

I divided the contents into three sections: ideas, people and places. Unbelievable that there are eighteen expositions in eighty-seven pages. Dom Francis whets the reader's desire to explore the ideas further. Virtues considered are hope, most needed today, patience, purity of heart, prayer meditation. Contemplation-in-action, Chapter One, presents a modern version of

those praying in a contemplative manner. It is not an atmosphere of peace, but areas of death and bloodshed as found in your next door neighbor. TV covers it every night, but when you see it happen, the need for a peace truce is urgent and possible.

Places in which noteworthy forms of monasticism began and have survived until now are presented — namely Irish Monasticism, Benedictinism and New Norcia's influence — a center of Christianity in the Australian outback. In each of these thriving communities, all members, present and potential would do well to remember the motto of St. Benedict, "Let nothing be preferred to the Word of God."

People portrayed are great well-knowns: Thomas Merton, Julian of Norwich, Vincent Pallotti, Michaelangelo, Thomas A. Kempis, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Dom Columba Marmion. All these giants are worthy of our imitation. Catherine was able to combine action and contemplation. We recall that she prevailed on Pope Gregory XI to leave Avignon and return to Rome.

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, there is much thought given to prayer and work. When Christ advised his apostles, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place," (Mk. 6:31) he meant nothing other than a special way of living and expressing the paschal mystery of Christ. Today, not only men and women religious, but many others through the grace of the Holy Spirit, reach contemplation. A major part of the Church's witness in the world today is in the areas of missionary work. Numberless people are laboring in many parts of the globe to spread the Gospel message. Yet the Council tells us that

there are two billion people who have never heard the message of Jesus. Looking more closely at men's and women's activity in the world, the Council states "that the monumental effort of men and women through the centuries to improve the circumstances of the world, presents no problems to believers..." And considered in itself, it corresponds to the Plan of God. When men and women work, not only do they transform matter and society, but they fulfill themselves. When this does not happen, it is well to reflect on the late Pope Paul VI's warning:

"Commotion, din, feverish activities, outward appearance and the crowd threaten man's inner awareness. He lacks silence with its genuine voice speaking in the depths of his being... He lacks order, he lacks prayer, he lacks peace, he lacks himself... (text p. 39)

Every day of the week throughout the world, the celebration of the Eucharist takes place. It is the focal point of worship and our total life. No one but Christ could issue such an invitation to come, and He will not turn him away. Christ calls to the market places of the world, but people must turn their gaze in His direction. Come without money, just come to Me, and I will be your life. We are pilgrims moving along and greatly influenced by side attractions. We need to concentrate on the real meaning of the Mass and actively respond to it in thought, word and deed. Then the Word will be enfolded in each one of us. We must "prepare the way of the Lord" as John did and be ready to lose our head for what is right and true. No easy thing to do.

If anyone can write a more interesting text with numerous aspects of prayer

and exemplify it with real people, Dom Francis has excelled himself. It is a book worth reading and contemplating because you will find yourself and the Spirit at one.

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**Love In A Fearful Land: A Guatemalan Story.** By Henri J. M. Nouwen. Ave Maria Press: Notre Dame, IN 46556. Pp. 116.. Paperback, \$5.95.

*Reviewed by Friar Thomas Bourque, T.O.R., Chairperson of the Philosophical and Religious Studies Department of Saint Francis College of Pennsylvania.*

*So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

*Ephesians 2:19-22*

These words of Paul to the Ephesians captures the spirit and foundation of Henri Nouwen's book, *Love In A Fearful Land*. This book invites the reader to reflect upon the paradox of friendship and servanthood in the midst of a confused world. Nouwen shares the friendship which has grown among four individuals in a mysterious way as each has attempted to serve God and the people of God.

The two sojourners and prophets whom Nouwen speaks of are two American priests who served the people of

Guatemala. Father Stan Rother served the Tzutuhil people in Santiago Atitlan as their priest and was martyred for his concern and love for the people. Father John Vesey followed the ministry and service of Stan in response to God's call. His ministry led him to much soul searching and remembering of the saints who had gone before him. Stan was a modern day saint and martyr for John and the Tzutuhil people. The stories of Stan's and John's encounter with God's poor is a story of prayer.

As one begins to enter into the spirit and purpose of this book, one quickly realizes that Nouwen is more interested in recounting the active service of these two individuals than in supplying the reader with a biographical sketch of their lives. The fellow citizens who shared this journey shared by Nouwen are three friends united in the presence of the Spirit and memories of their struggles to serve God. The journey is one of a martyr, Stanley Rother; a servant of God, John Vesey; and two compassion-filled onlookers, Henri Nouwen and Peter Weiskel. Nouwen, a professor of pastoral theology and the author of numerous books, and Weiskel, a photographer and colleague of Nouwen's, capture the story of this journey through vivid photographs and a memorable narrative.

This journey of faith is one of struggle, prayer, survival, risk, friendship and hope. Nouwen and Weiskel attempt to understand the struggle of two servants of God who were striving to proclaim the gospel to the least of their sisters and brothers. In doing so, they challenge the reader to struggle with a response to the gospel. A major question focused on throughout the book is: "What have you done for the least of mine?" It is a question not only for each

individual, but for each community and nation as well.

As Nouwen shares the situations of these two priests, he captures for the reader a very important insight for reflection. It is only after one has spent time looking into self that one is capable of turning attention to others. In responding to the needs of the people of Guatemala, Stan Rother and John Vesey learned the price of Christian freedom. Although the gospel and their ministry demanded risks of every sort, both servants of the people learned the true meaning of service and hope. Through the act of opening up to others and God, both Stan and John learned to live with and to go beyond the confusion they found surrounding them. It was in prayer and faith that they both began to accept their situations, one in which they found themselves confronted constantly with oppression and threats by the government of Guatemala.

*Love In A Fearful Land* challenges the individual to approach prayer and service by asking, "Why does one pray and serve?" Reflection upon this question allows one to find out what the price and the risk involved in living out the gospel message is. That price and risk for Stan Rother was martyrdom. For John Vesey it was separation from a people he loved and served because of the threats made upon his life. Nouwen shares the journey of God's mysterious plans for two men in *Love In A Fearful Land* and challenges us to reflect upon our own call. If God prepares us for our service in his kingdom, have we taken the opportunity to prepare ourselves to serve? Stan Rother and John Vesey prepared themselves after being sent to Guatemala. Now the challenge is left up to us.

## Index to THE CORD — 1988

### I. Index to Authors

- Agosto, T.O.R., Dominick.  
Poem: Our Lady, 140.
- Aveling, T.S.S.F., Harry.  
"A Letter from St. Francis," 257-261.
- Baader, O.S.B., Sr. Mary Lenore.  
Poem: Whistling in the Wind, 251.
- Balk, O.S.F., Sr. Virginia.  
Poem: Laverna, 31.
- Berna, O.F.M., Francis.  
"To Know His Will," 175-79; "Francis Meets the Wolf of Gubbio," 305-312.  
Book Review: *Francis The Incomparable Saint*, 187-89.
- Bonanno, O.F.M., Raphael.  
"Francis in Prison and Non-Violence," 142-44.
- Bonaventure, P.C.C., Sr. Mary.  
"Saint Clare: Paschal Woman," 196-98.
- Bourque, T.O.R., Thomas.  
Book Reviews: *A Blessed Weakness: The Spirit of Jean Vanier and L'Arch*, 314-15; *Love in a Fearful Land: A Guatemalan Story*, 347-48.
- Cecily, F.M.M., Sr. Paul.  
"Pray Unceasingly" According to Indian Spirituality and St. Francis," 180-86.
- Couturier, O.F.M. Cap., David.  
"Life in Ministry: from Transcultural to Trans-economic Formation," 293-304; 326-333.
- D'Aversa, T.O.R., Robert J.  
Poem: Franciscan Institute 1988, 288.
- Davies, O.F.M., Julian A.  
Editorial: "Scholarship is Ministry and Is Franciscan," 33-34.  
Book Reviews: *Miracles: A Catholic View*, 94; *The New Catholics*, 128; *The Catholic Moment*, 189; *Catherine of Siena*, 255-56; *Why Jesus Christ?* 256.
- Diensberg, O.S.F., Christine.  
Poems: It's Time, 100; The Beach, 192.
- Doino, O.F.M., Joseph.  
Editorial: "Mary as Disciple: A Promising Image," 129-30;
- Dufault, F.M.M., Alma.  
"Prophetic Witness in the World: Challenges to Franciscan Formation for the Future," 276-86.
- Eulberg, Sr. Mary Thomas.  
Poem: Lenten Sequence, 68.
- Finnegan, O.F.M., Joyce.  
Poem: The Warbler's Return, 57.
- Francis, S.A., Sr. Lorelei.  
Poems: Holy Week, 95; Early Morning Walk in a Garden of Praise, 246.
- Francilene, CSSF, Sr. Mary.  
"Music and a Religious Franciscan," 97-100.
- Gallagher, O.S.F., Sr. Marie Francis.  
Book Reviews: *Living with Sickness*, 93; *Becoming More Like Jesus*, 125-28; *The Ways of Prayer; An Introduction*, 125-28; *The Narrow Gate*, 346-47.
- Gautney, Dr. Diane D.  
"Reflection for the Marian Year," 65-68.



- Guidar, O.S.F., Sr. Margaret Eletta.  
"Power, Policy and the Franciscan Administration," 229-235.
- Harrington, Jerry W.  
Poem: The Healing Fire, 165.
- Hart, O.F.M. Cap., Michael J.  
Book Review: *The Gracious Mystery: Finding God in Ordinary Experience*, 63-64.
- Hept, O.F.M., Wilfrid.  
"Living Tradition," 289-92.
- Hickey, O.S.C., Sr. Rita Marie.  
"Two Aspects of Franciscan Celibacy," 218-223.
- Holden, O.S.F., Sr. Margaret.  
Poem: Assisi Morning, 157.
- Holmes, John R.  
Poem: Solvite Templum Hoc, 159.
- Hone, O.S.C., Sr. Mary Francis.  
"Religious Experience in Poor Clare Tradition," 199-213.
- Hoppe, O.F.M., Leslie J.  
Book Review: *The World is a Prayerful Place*, 92-93.
- Horgan, S.A., Thaddeus.  
Editorials: "Rebuilding the Church Today," 1-3; "Who is the Holy Spirit?," 225-228.
- Hurley, O.F.M., Daniel.  
Book Review: *Into Your Hands, Lord*, 190.
- Hurschler, S.F.O., Elsa.  
Book Review: "Only to Do His Will". Life Story of Rafael Cardinal Merry Del Val, 318.
- Isabel, O.F.M. Damien.  
"Admonition XXVII and the Content of the Ministry to Spiritual Direction," 4-18;  
"The Virtues" in Admonition XXVII of the Writings of Francis of Assisi and their Usefulness in Spiritual Discernment," 35-57.
- Jarmak, O.F.M. Conv., Claude.  
"Sermon for the First Sunday of Lent by St. Bonaventure," 79-88.
- Jeffrey, David L., tr.  
Poem: Orison to Francis, 262.
- Kocka, O.F.M., Conv., David.  
Book Review: *The Gethsemani Poems*, 89-92.
- Leary, O.F.M., Patrick G.  
Poem: A Concelebrated Death, 95.
- Logue, O.S.F., Sr. Colette.  
Poem: Son of Man Our Lover, 174.
- Lynn, O.S.C., Sr. Beth.  
"Poverty, Thirteenth Century Revitalizations in the Writings of Clare of Assisi," 19-31.
- Lyons, T.O.R., Peter A.  
"Contemplation: Communion with Jesus' Father," 236-40.
- Macaluso, Peter F.  
Book Reviews: *Sensing Your Hidden Presence: Toward Intimacy with God*, 313-14; *Julian: Woman of Our Day*, 316-18.
- Maganzini, O.F.M., John V.  
Poem: Rebuild, 3.
- McCormack, O.S.F., Sr. Dorothy.  
"The Essential Elements of the Evangelical Life of Franciscans," 241-46.
- McCormack, Ed.  
"St. Francis Challenges the Yuppies," 58-62.
- McNichols, S.J., S.F.O., William.  
Poem: The Eternal Summer Aspect of the Child, 150-51.
- Milunski, O.F.M. Conv., Brad.  
"Sermon for the First Sunday of Lent by St. Bonaventure," 79-88.
- Monti, O.F.M., Dominic.  
Book Review: *From Intuition to Institution*, 344-346.
- Mulholland, O.F.M., Séamus.  
"The Power of St. Francis' Preaching," 101-106;  
"The Wolf of Gubbio: Justice and Peace Motif," 145-49; "St. Francis as Dramatist and Poet," 339-343.
- Poems: The Portiuncula Doves, 166; Scented Kerchiefs, 217; London and Assisi, 319.
- O'Connor, O.F.M., Charles J.  
Book Reviews: *The Great Themes of Scriptures: Old Testament*, 254-55; *A Conversation with God: A Catholic View of Prophecy*, 315-16.
- Mary Pius, O.S.C., Sr.  
Poem: Notes from Lazarus' Journal, 124.
- Rochford, O.F.M. Conv., Jude  
"Mary's Spanish Sons — Our American Heroes," 167-74.
- Robertson, O.F.M., Theodore.  
Poem: Father Serra, 228.
- Ryan, O.S.F., Sr. Mary Thomas.  
Poem: Sister Leaf, 252-53.
- Sabatino, O.F.M., Hugoline A.  
Poem: "From Christmas to New Year," 338.
- Schallick, O.F.M., Hermann.  
"On How Certain Brothers from Rome Reflected on the Admonition (XXVII) of Brother Francis," 107-110; "Reflection on the Manner in Which Some Brothers From Rome Discovered the Importance of Music and Other Arts for the Work of Evangelization," 161-65; "On How Some Brothers From Rome Celebrated the Advent of the Lord on African Soil," 321-325.
- Schmidt, SFCC, SFO, T., Anne.  
"The Cross of San Damiano Still Speaks," 69-78.

- Shanahan, O.F.M., Gregory.  
"A Truly Seraphic Prayer," 152-56.
- Spaeth, Paul J.  
"St. Bonaventure's Collations on the Ten Commandments," Collation 1, 112-123.
- Stets, O.S.B., Sr. Edmund Marie.  
Poems: Lent, 78; Passionflower, 95.
- Temple, O.F.M., David.  
"St. Francis and St. Clare and the Custody of the Eucharist," 214-16.
- Thom, O.S.F., Sr. Francis Ann.  
"Like an Eagle Soaring," 183-95.

- Book Reviews: *Mother Angelica's Answers and Promises*, 64; *Clare Among her Sisters*, 223-24; *The Prayers of St. Francis*, 256.
- T.O.R. Friars in the South Bronx.  
"Creating Opportunity for Contemplation," 247-50.
- Watts, Elizabeth.  
"Symbols of Ascent in the Soul's Journey Into God of Bonaventure," 263-75.
- Wilbe, O.F.M., Conv., Charles.  
Poems: LaVerna, 240; Blind, Yet Seeing, 296-97.

## II. Index of Subjects

- Advent, 321.
- Ascent to God in St. Bonaventure, 263-275.
- Administration and Franciscans, 229-235.
- Admonitions of St. Francis, 4-18; 35-56; 107-110.
- Bonaventure, St.  
Collations on Ten Commandments, 112-123.  
Journey of the Soul Into God, 263-275.  
Prayer after Communion, 152-56.  
Sermon on First Sunday of Lent, 79-86.
- Celibacy, 217-223.
- Clare, St.  
and Custody of the Eucharist, 214-16.  
and Poverty, 19 - 31.  
Paschal Woman, 196-98.  
and Religious Experience,  
Visions of, 193-95, 199-213.
- Contemplation, 236-240; 247-50.
- Discernment in the Spiritual Life, 35-56; 175-79.
- Ecumenism, 1-3.
- Eucharist, Custody of, 214-16.
- Evangelical Life, 241-46.
- Evangelization, 161-65; 225-28.
- Francis, St.  
and Drama, 339.  
and Justice and Peace, 276-85.  
Letter to Lay People, 257-61.  
and Mary, 131-39.  
and Non-Violence, 142-44.  
and Preaching, 101-106.  
and Spiritual Direction, 4-18; 35-56.  
and San Damiano Cross, 69-67.  
and Yuppies, 58-62.
- Franciscans  
and Administration, 229-235.
- and Celibacy, 218-23.
- and Custody of the Eucharist, 214-16.
- and Contemplation, 107-110.
- and Evangelical Life, 241-46.
- and Indian Spirituality, 180-86.
- and Minority, 293-304; 326-333.
- and Music, 101-106; 161-65.
- and Prayer, 180-86.
- and Scholarship, 33-34.
- Franciscan Martyrs of Georgia, 167-74.
- Greccio, 334.
- Holy Spirit, 225-28.
- Indian Spirituality and Prayer, 180-86.
- Journal of the Soul Into God, 263-275.
- Justice and Peace, 145-49; 276-85; 289-302.
- Lent, Sermon of St Bonaventure, 79-86.
- Mary  
and the Marian Year, 65-68.  
Model of Franciscan Spirituality, 131-39.  
Promising Image, 129-30.
- Music,  
and Evangelization, 161-65.  
and Franciscans, 97-100.
- Non-Violence, 142-44.
- Poor Clares, and Religious Experience, 199-213.
- Poverty, and St. Clare, 19-31.
- Preaching, 101-106.
- Prayer, 180-86; 236-40.
- Religious Experience, 199-213.
- San Damiano Cross, 69-78.
- Scholarship and Ministry, 33-34.
- South Bronx, 247-50.
- Spiritual Direction, 4-18; 35-56.
- Wolf of Gubbio, 145-49; 309-16.

### III. Index of Books Reviewed

(SN — Shorter Book Notice)

- Angelica, Mother and Allison Christine. *Mother Angelica's Answers and Promises* (F. A. Thom), 64.
- Bacik, James J. *The Gracious Mystery: Finding God in Ordinary Experience* (M. J. Hart), 63-64.
- Baldwin, Anne B. *Catherine of Siena. A Biography* (J. A. Davies), 255-56.
- Baldwin, Robert. *A Conversation with God: A Catholic View of Prophecy* (C. O'Connor), 315-316.
- Brady, O.F.M., Ignatius, tr. *The Prayers of St. Francis* (F. A. Thom), 256.
- Bergant, C.S.A., Dianne. *The World is a Prayerful Place* (L. Hoppe), 92-3.
- Byrne, O.S.B., Dom Francis. *The Narrow Gate* (M. F. Gallagher), 346-47.
- Canera, Dom Helder. *Into Your Hands Lord* (D. Hurley), 190.
- Carol, O.F.M., Juniper. *Why Jesus Christ?* (SN J. A. Davies), 256.
- Catherine of Genoa. *Catherine of Genoa: Purgation and Purgatory: The Spiritual Dialogue* (R. Hurzeler), 191-92.
- Desbonnets, O.F.M., Theophile. *From Intuition To Institution: The Franciscans* (D. Monti), 344-46.
- Dhont, O.F.M., Charles. *Clare Among Her Sisters* (F. A. Thom), 213-14.
- Downey, Michael. *A Blessed Weakness: The Spirit of Jean Vanier and L'Arche* (T. Bourque), 314-15).
- Chezzi, Bert. *Becoming More Like Jesus* (M. F. Gallagher), 125-26.
- Larranga, O.F.M. Cap. *Sensing Your Hidden Presence; Toward Intimacy With God* (P. F. Macaluso), 313-14.
- Llewelyn, Robert, Ed. *Julian: Woman of Our Day* (P. F. Macaluso), 316-18.
- Lortz, Joseph. *Francis the Incomparable Saint* (F. Berna), 187-89.
- McInerney, Ralph. *Miracles: A Catholic View* (SN, J. A. Davies), 189.
- Neuhaus, Richard John. *The Catholic Moment* (J. A. Davies), 189.
- Nouwen, Henry J. M., *Love in a Fearful Land* (T. Bourque), 347-48.
- O'Neil, Dan, Ed. *The New Catholics* (J. S. Davies), 189.
- Pennock, Michael F. *The Ways of Prayer: An Introduction* (M. F. Gallagher), 125-28.
- Rohr, Richard. *The Great Themes of Scripture: Old Testament* (C. O'Connor), 254-55.
- Rust, Renee. *Making the Psalms YOUR Prayer* (C. O'Connor), 254-55.
- Saint Sing, Susan. *Living with Sickness* (M. F. Gallagher), 93-4.
- Seitz, Ron. *The Gethsemani Poems* (D. Kocka), 89-93.
- Death Eat* (D. Kocka), 89-93.

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