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The Franciscan Institute St. Bonaventure University St. Bonaventure, NY 14778 **MARCH**, 1991

The

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW



SPECIAL ISSUE: FRANCISCAN MINISTRY

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Volume 41, No. 3

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 Clerics¹
EpCust: Letter to Superiors¹
EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful¹
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
1I, 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).

About the March, 1991 CORD

In this issue of **The CORD** we are privileged to publish talks on the theme of Franciscan Ministry delivered at the Franciscan Formation Directors Conference held at St. Bonaventure University in July of 1990. Brother F. Edward Coughlin, O.F.M., new director of the Franciscan Institute and originator of the conference, graciously took the initiative in suggesting to the three presenters at the conference to use **The CORD** as a medium for making their reflections and insights available to all of our readers. We are most grateful to Fr. Dominic Monti, O.F.M., Fr. Michael Blastic, O.F.M. Conv., and to Sr. Rosemary Chinnici, S.L., for their generosity.

Because of the thematic nature of our three articles, we have chosen to publish them in one issue and have had to suspend for March the series on evangelization by Fr. Charles Finnegan. The April CORD will resume his fine series.

I believe that our readers may appreciate knowing that all who contribute writings to The Cord do so without monetary remuneration. They simply accept as recompense three copies of the particular issue in which their writing appears. This spirit of generosity has enabled us to continue our mission to our readers.

We encourage artists, poets, and all those gifted with the ability to write to join us in serving our Franciscan sisters and brothers.



Franciscan Ministry — Changing Contexts and Historical Developments¹

DOMINIC MONTI, O.F.M.

'Franciscan Ministry': titles are generally innocuous, but I must admit that, on second thought, the wording of today's topic causes me a little discomfort. Does it imply that there is some kind of norm which would allow us to bestow the epithet 'Franciscan' on a particular type or type of ministries and to deny it to others? I instinctively recoil against such a suggestion, and for a good Franciscan reason. When Francis wrote to Brother Leo: "in whatever way it seems best to you to please the Lord God and to follow His footsteps and his poverty, do it with God's blessing and my obedience,"2 he was promulgating for his followers a charter of personal liberty which is nothing less than the spontaneous freedom of the children of God. As a result, if the expression 'Franciscan ministry' means anything, it can only be this: 'ministry that is done by a Franciscan.' After all, on his deathbed, Francis did not demand that his own brothers continue his particular ministry, rather, he prayed for a new inspiration: "I have done what was mine to do, may Christ teach you what you are to do."3 Francis is telling us something here: our charism and its consequent mission are not located in the past; they exist only in the present moment, whether that be yesterday or today. The activities of past generations of Franciscan men and women cannot dictate precisely how and where we are to serve the kingdom; we have to find that out for ourselves.

Are we condemned, then, to a hundred and one different opinions about ministry, a situation which would mean that, even on a superficial level, one of the essential bonds which unites us in Franciscan communities

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striving to follow the footsteps of Christ according to Francis' example would simply dissolve? Yes, we are all individuals not clones working for some spiritual services version of IBM. Each of us has our own distinct and valuable personal identities, our different talents and particular "grace of working." This personalistic dimension must always be respected when we approach Franciscan ministry. But there is another question that must be asked, which flows from the essentially fraternal character of our life. Francis and his brothers, Clare and her sisters, despite their prized individuality, also held chapters to discern where and how they together wanted to witness to the Lord.

This same issue arises for us: how are we bound up with Francis and one another? Does being a Franciscan mean simply that I am blessed with a hassle-free environment enabling me to hang up a shingle for my private ministerial practice? It seems clear to me that the answer to this question is no. The very fact that I claim to be a Franciscan, and not simply an individual Christian, Dominic Monti, attempting to minister to God's people in my own way, means that I have to search out some fundamental issues with my brothers. Why I minister as a Franciscan and not simply as an individual implies sharing some meaningful vision of ministry with the others who also call themselves 'Franciscan.' Therefore, we also have to ask Francis' question precisely as communities: 'What is the Lord calling us to do?'"

My own background as a historian convinces me that the past can offer us a good deal of assistance in answering this question. But we should not turn to our Franciscan tradition in hopes of discovering there some blueprint laying out for us exactly what ministries should be considered Franciscan. We can only expect to find out how earlier generations of Francis brothers and sisters aswered that question — "what is ours to do?" — for themselves. Still, to look closely at their answer can be very instructive in forging our own. And so in this presentation, I would like to do two things: first, to better understand why facing the question of Franciscan ministry is an especially critical one at our particular point in history, and secondly, to give an example of a creative Franciscan ministerial response by examining the one given by the friars of the thirteenth century.

First of all, we should briefly consider the importance of asking this question about the nature of Franciscan ministry at this point of our history. Just where are we? Posing the question of ministry out of our experience today as North American Franciscans, we are very much aware that the past twenty-five 'post-conciliar' years have resulted in a wide divergence of positions on this issue in all our communities. Those of us who are old enough realize that this is indeed something new. Prior to Vatican II, despite the obvious superficial differences between First, Sec-

ond, and Third Order communities, most Franciscans in the United States were actually pretty similar when it came to ministry. Except for our contemplative sisters, the Clares, we were all involved in various corporate apostolates of pastoral or social service maintained by our congregations. These ministries were animated by a common vision and sustained by a shared system of meaning and symbols; our ministry was very much a 'team effort,' often to a point of stifling individual initiative and creativity for the sake of the common effort.

Although we are almost totally absorbed in these ministries, it is important to put them in perspective. The vast majority of them were products of the relatively recent past, and reflected a specific historical context: the immigrant church of the later 19th and early 20th centuries. No Franciscan community in the United States or Canada is yet 150 years old. The current organized Franciscan presence in our countries dates back to the 1840's and 1850's, when German, Italian, and Irish immigrants formed missionary units of European provinces or created independent communities on American soil. 6 The ministries these Franciscan men and women developed reflected their mission to an immigrant church. The vast majority of them, clergy and laity alike, were small-town or rural European Catholics shaped by the forces of the Restoration era. Suddenly on alien soil, they assumed that their Catholicism and the American way of life were fundamentally at odds, that as Catholics they comprised a sub-culture having values distinctly different from the larger society. Their ministries, therefore, were tied to maintaining and nurturing the faith of this immigrant faith community. We Franciscans committed ourselves to provide the institutions which could offer a cultural anchor, a spiritual refuge, and social security to a threatened block in an unfriendly environment. The Friars Minor, unlike their European brothers, found themselves staffing a large number of parishes. The many new Third Order congregations of women and men became deeply committed to the burgeoning parochial school system, hospitals, and orphanages.

The situation has changed dramatically in the last twenty-five years Sociologically speaking, American Catholicism had lost much of its ethnic cast by the early 1960's; the children and grandchildren of the immigrants were increasingly culturally assimilated to the wider society. When coupled with the new vision of the church's mission in the world which emanated from the Second Vatican Council, our traditional ministries were placed in an entirely different context. With the passing of a "ghetto Catholicism," voices began to be raised questioning our tremendous investment in maintaining distinctly Catholic institutions. In addition, the church's growing consciousness of a 'preferential option for the poor' has also rightly caused a number of communities to re-examine their ministerial commitments in its light.

Today we see a vast ministerial spectrum across our Franciscan communities. A few of the most conservative groups among us have attempted to carry on pretty much as before, but even they have had to cope with serious ministerial dislocations caused by declining numbers. In most of our congregations, however, ministries have been radically transformed by the forces of liberalization, which in Franciscan circles has been carried out under the aegis of "fraternity." In reaction to the hierarchical, uniform, and authoritarian structures of our communities prior to the Council, we spent a good deal of energy in the late 60's and through the 70's developing organizational patterns "to allow for more personal freedom, wider pluralism of expression, and a greater tolerance for diversity."

These internal changes have had a tremendous impact on our Franciscan ministries. More and more individuals, expressing their own personal talents and responding to what they believed to be critical needs of the contemporary church, have taken the opportunity to minister outside of their community's corporate commitments; many of these religious increasingly live alone, with only tenuous personal links to the rest of their congregation. Meanwhile, many communities, in an attempt to respond to the 'signs of the times,' have enthusiastically sent members to establish new ministries to the 'marginalized' members of society, reflecting the peace and justice thrust of the contemporary church. At the same time other Franciscans are still desperately trying to staff the parishes and other institutions built up by previous generations, with fewer and fewer of them doing the work, they hardly have time to question what is really being done, for whom, and why. If your community is like mine, you are coming to the realization that all three of these directions cannot continue at the same time. None of us have the 'troops' to do everything, and a time for real choices in our ministries seems to be needed. I say choices, based not on some Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' but on a renewed communal effort to work out of a shared vision of Franciscan ministry todav.9

When we turn to the Franciscan sources for some assistance in this task, we find that they offer us a tremendous inspiration, but not many concrete ministerial directions. What is clear from the sources is that the Franciscan charism is essentially missionary in character. Francis himself stated this when he told his friars: "For he has sent you into the whole world for this reason: that in word and deed you may give witness to his voice and bring everyone to know that there is no one who is all-powerful except him." The fundamental documents of our congregations, attempting to retrieve Francis' charism for our own time, have reiterated this basic missionary thrust. For example, the 1987 General Constitutions of the Friars Minor begin the chapter on the work of the friars with the statement: "all the brothers, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, are

sent to the whole world to be heralds of the Gospel." This passage sets the tone for the rest of the chapter; the word 'ministry' is seldom used; instead, we see reference to 'mission,' 'evangelization,' and 'work.' This distinction is not merely semantic. It goes right to the heart of the role of the Franciscan movement in the church, for it turns out that formal 'ministry,' in the ordinary ecclesiastical sense of that term, is only one aspect of a much broader reality. As the next chapter of these same Constitutions continue:

Wherever they are and whatever they do, the brothers should dedicate themselves to the task of proclaiming the Gospel: whether they live a contemplative and penitential life together as brothers, working for the fraternity or in the world while undertaking intellectual and material activities, or exercising as pastoral ministry in parishes or other ecclesiastical institutions, or finally by the witness of a simple Franciscan presence that announces the coming of the reign of God. ¹²

This passage, very reminiscent of Chapter 17 of the Earlier Rule, makes it obvious, in the words of the seminal document, "The Vocation of the Order Today" (1973), that the Friars Minor are "not merely an apostolic team.... an organization structured for one or several apostolic tasks." Indeed, the contemporary retrieval of the Franciscan charism has shown that the original work of Francis' brothers "was not principally ministerial in the present meaning of the word." Of course, this same passage illustrates why the Poor Clares are also exercising an authentically Franciscan 'ministry.' For if the Franciscan mission is simply 'living the Gospel' together as brothers and sisters, then silent contemplation may be as effective a missionary proclamation as preached words or works of active service. 14

These statements of our charism create a tremendous latitude for Franciscan communities in their current process of refounding. But just as in the thirteenth century, these basic convictions of our order regarding its missionary role within the church involve a certain tension with existing ecclesial structures. Canon law presently recognizes only two basic types of religious life: monastic orders, devoted to contemplation, and apostolic institutes.' In the latter, the "works of all the members are directly related to a common apostolate which the church has recognized as expressing concretely the purpose of the institute." An increasing number of Franciscan scholars have drawn attention to the fact that our charism does not really fit into either category, since its work "is clearly not formal prayer nor is the work determined by the needs of world within the context of a 'corporate apostolate.' The work is to imitate Christ and to make that experience available to others." 15

It seems to me that a major unresolved issue in many Franciscan communities worldwide is the relative weight to be given to these two very different forms of Franciscan mission envisioned by our sources; do we allow friars and/or sisters simply to establish a fraternal life together, but going out separately to work 'in the midst of others' (the intentional community model) — not viewing this as people 'doing their own things,' but precisely as an integral expression of the mission of the community — or do we emphasize participation in the structured 'corporate commitments' of the community which better fit into the patterns of the 'apostolate' exercised through formally established church institutions? Some Franciscan communities have resolved this question by selecting one or the other of these alternatives; most of us, I presume, are somewhere in the middle, trying to allow our members to do both, but as the 'personnel crunch' becomes more critical, chapters are being forced to make painful decisions in this regard.

Even for the three orders of Friars Minor, which historically have been orientated towards the pastoral ministry since the 1230's, a crucial question emerges: how does our ministry as Franciscan priests and deacons fit into the ecclesial structures? Is there simply 'one priesthood,' so that the only difference between diocesan and religious clergy is one of their particular spiritualities and the fact that the latter are bound by the religious vows in their personal lives? This question has been squarely addressed by the Jesuit historian John O'Malley in an important article in Theological Studies. In my opinion, O'Malley convincingly demonstrates that historically this has never been the case. Although since the rise of the mendicant orders religious have seen involvement in the pastoral ministry as an important element of their way of life, they have generally gone about that ministry in a very different way from the diocesan clergy. The latter's ministry has focused around local, stable faith communities (exemplified in the parish), in close hierarchical union with their bishop. In contrast, religious orders have tended not to concentrate their ministries around fixed local communities, but were mobile, reaching out to a wide population and/or forming associational types of communities; their ministry was prophetic, largely directed to the marginalized "edges" of Christian society or to non-believers; it was often exercised without a direct relationship to the local ordinary. 16 For many American friars, this distinction of roles became blurred due to the missionary situation of the church in the United States in the middle of the last century, when Franciscans began reestablishing themselves in this country. The needs of an immigrant church on alien soil, where a local church had to be established from the ground up, meant a heavy investment of friar personnel in parochial ministry.

O'Malley concludes by calling upon religious communities "to recover the pragmatic approach to ministry that current historiography is showing happily characterized our past," realizing that the true demands of the Gospel today are not necessarily determined by institutional church needs, that even exercising pastoral ministry as religious priests does not necessarily imply 'filling the holes' in the diocesan structure. In other words, O'Malley is calling us, as our own Franciscan documents do, to discern the demands of being 'heralds of the gospel' in our contemporary world, and to reevaluate our involvement in specific ministries in light of this renewed sense of mission.

O'Malley speaks of religious having "a pragmatic approach" to ministry. My dictionary defines 'pragmatic' as "relating to matters of fact rather than theory," a conviction that "the function of thought is to guide action." In other words, he is calling us to root our ministry in the 'real world where people are at,' 'rather than working out of some purely theoretic concept of what ministry 'should be.' That is why I believe a look back at the thirteenth century can be very instructive for us, for our brothers and sisters, in the first generations of the Franciscan movement went to the heart of their culture, imaginatively devising new approaches for ministry responding to the real needs of their time and place.

Over the past decade, a new generation of historians has tried to locate the Franciscan movement in its broader social, economic, and cultural context, clearly illustrating how the ministerial strategies of the new mendicant orders were responding to the pressing needs of their times. ¹⁸ This research has made it very clear that the Franciscans were the popular movement *par excellence*; the men and women attracted to it were drawn largely from the broad middle classes of the rising new towns of medieval Europe, they had experienced certain religious needs themselves, and although they rejected certain 'demonic' elements of their society, they turned towards the same people from whom they had come, ministering to their needs.

The Franciscan movement would have been inconceivable without the revival of urban life. In the later eleventh and twelfth centuries, Western Europe had finally begun to emerge from a purely subsistence farming economy; for the first time since the end of the Roman Empire, there were agricultural surpluses and a revival of manufacturing (chiefly cloth) and commerce; prosperous towns began to spring up along the trading routes. Nowhere were these trends more apparent than northern and central Italy, where recent studies have shown that the years between 1210 and 1340 were a period of general prosperity and rapid population growth. The economy was burgeoning, and labor was a short supply. The feudal system started crumbling under the impact of these trends. Betteroff peasants were increasingly becoming freeholders, and large numbers of them were drawn to the thriving industrial and market towns for work. Assisi itself had to extend its city walls three times in fifty years of accommodate a rapidly expanding population. These crowded towns were not composed of destitute masses. We cannot project back the vast systemic The activities of past generations of Franciscan men and women cannot dictate precisely how and where we are to serve the kingdom; we have to find that out for ourselves.

poverty of today's third world nations to Francis' Italy, where "poverty resulted from choice or idiosyncratic misfortune of the most personal sort... those who had suddenly lost their normal means of sustenance [widows, orphans, sick, injured], not from the structure of the economy. Indeed the overwhelming mass of the urban population... had steady work and enjoyed a reasonable level of economic security." 19

These vast economic and social changes created a ferment within existing political and religious institutions. On a political level, the old feudal aristocracy was gradually forced to share their power with the new elite popolo grasso the merchants and bankers who were the 'movers and shakers' of the urban economy. The vast rank-and-file of ordinary popolo, the craftsmen, shopkeepers, and professionals, were also seeking their place in the government of the commune. Civil strife was a constant feature of thirteenth century Italy, but the religious aspirations of the townspeople were no less important. Their new social and economic realities governing their lives demanded a relatively sophisticated type of moral guidance, in which Gospel ethical principles could be made relevant to individuals in very different situations. In addition, this increasingly literate urban population hungered to approach the Scriptures on its own, or at least through effective preaching, being naturally drawn to the new affective piety which emphasized the direct personal relationship of the individual to God, rather than simply through cultic worship.

The existing structures of church ministry were ill-equipped to meet these needs. The typical priest was theologically uneducated, a situation perhaps excusable in a rural setting where he functioned largely as the performer of ritual and 'rabbi' of an oral tradition; but this type of clergyman was in no position to preach effectively or offer the type of moral guidance people were demanding in the towns. The centers of spiritual vitality — the monasteries — were, by definition, withdrawn from the flux of urban life. In addition, as the new popular classes struggled to gain political power from the nobility, they found the institutional church closely allied with their opponents, the old feudal aristocracy. Both clergy and monks were supported by their landed estates; the rents, dues, and tithes due them by law placed them over and apart from the average town dweller.

For many, the wealth and careerism of a largely inadequate clerical establishment created an almost insuperable obstacle to their relating to the church, and goes a long way to explain the form and appeal of the popular heresies of the time.

It was the peculiar genius of the friars to respond to this situation. They were able to do so because, for the most part they came from this same urban popolo; they knew what the religious needs of the people were because they had experienced them themselves. I think it is extremely important here to note first who the friars and sisters were, how their society viewed them, and what was the life they created for themselves. So often we Americans immediately leap to 'ministry' as the solution, to the various services we can offer people, forgetting that our primary contribution is ourselves, the way we 'live the Gospel.' The friars were such a great success in the thirteenth century because their whole way of life was a powerful message, expressing so many of the deepest aspirations of their society. Their very name, "Lesser Brothers," denoted this. On the one hand, the friars were clearly rejecting the old feudal order the rest of the popolo was also rejecting; on the other hand, they were also refusing to participate in what they and many others of that same urban popolo were experiencing as 'demonic' elements of that new social world.

First of all, the very notion of 'brotherhood' expressed the deepest political aspirations of the popolo of the medieval town. A brotherhood was not a hierarchical order; it existed only in the concrete, created out of the reciprocal relationship of each brother or sister to the other; everyone had a vital and constituent part. Furthermore, Francis' brotherhood was universal, open to all, regardless of social class, ecclesiastical status, or economic condition. Finally, there was a radical equality of its members; there was one set of rights and duties, and titles of rank ('abbot' or 'prior') were banned. In addition, Francis' brothers were *minores*, little brothers. Typical townspeople could say, "They're just like us — working for a living." The Lesser brothers and Poor Sisters identified with the working poor — "those who acquire their daily subsistence by the work of their hands, without anything remaining to them after they have eaten." Living from day to day by the fruit of their own labor, or by begging in return for their spiritual service of witness and preaching, the friars placed themselves firmly among the working classes, at the same time rejecting the great temptation of the upwardly mobile - money, which could simply breed avarice and a desire for profit.

From this context, an identification with the best values of the broad urban masses, the friars creatively developed a ministerial strategy reponding to their needs. It has been said that our ministry, like that of esus, has to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." In many

ways, the friars in the thirteenth century did precisely that: on the one hand, they validated the positive religious experience of the popolo; telling them in a wide variety of ways, "you're worthwhile. God is present in your lives." At the same time, the friars went on to challenge these same people to deeper conversion, calling them to recognize and confront the 'demonic' elements in their lives. Thus, "the unique achievement of the friars was their creation of new forms of religious expression specifically for the urban sector of society and the classes of people dominant in it." 20

The chief vehicles of the friars' pastoral ministry in the thirteenth century were preaching and the sacrament of reconciliation: the first was their means of reaching the widest popular audience; the second was the way they could deal one-on-one with the individual who had felt the desire to turn more deeply to God and implement Gospel values in his or her life. Using these means, the friars created a new spirituality and a new theology.

Franciscan preaching in the middle ages was eminently popular, aiming at having people experience God in their lives and moving them to action. Franciscans would have agreed with the great American evangelical, Jonathan Edwards, who argued that the seat of religion was in the affections: people are not moved so much by head-arguments as by gut-convictions. The task is somehow to reach that deeper level which alone can motivate true conversion. In doing so, the friars abandoned the newly-developed Scholastic sermon increasingly popular in academic clerical circles (about the only place one could hear a sermon until the mendicants began hitting the markets), which articulated and elucidated a text by means of a series of logical divisions. Instead, the friars believed in "measuring the word of God according to the capacity of the hearers," and so spoke, not in educated Latin, but in the languages of the streets. An eye-witness, Thomas of Spalato, tells us that he was stunned when he first heard Francis preaching: he was not really giving a sermon at all, but talking like a merchant hawking his wares or a politician arguing a point at a public assembly; in other words, he was trying to sway an audience to action. 21 The keys of a Franciscan sermon were its concreteness, immediacy and simplicity. Its purpose was to have its hearers confront God's presence in their experience, move them to conversion of heart (a new way of thinking'), and so to action and involvement.

The Franciscan call for penance reached every sector of society, many who were touched by God's call in their lives sought concrete direction from the friars, often in the sacrament of reconciliation. "What must I do to gain everlasting life?" That perennial question was now being asked by people in situations which were morally ambiguous by the standards of the current moral theology, which had been developed in an earlier age and did not really address the very different ethical situation of the

new urban environment. Indeed, the new service and commercial economy had created a virtual crisis in moral theology. In not so subtle ways, the church, still emotionally tied to the old order, had been telling the new social classes they were "no good." The very existence of cities was traced back to Cain. Canon law stigmatized merchants by consistently maintaining that it was impossible to avoid sin in the course of buying and selling. Gratian's Decretum summed it all up: "a merchant is rarely or ever able to please God." This prejudice was picked up by theology; Peter Lombard, whose work had such widespread currency, reiterated that merchants could not perform their duties without sinning. Part of the reason for this negative view of commercial activity was that moneylending, an essential fact of life at the new capitalist economy, had been consistently condemned as intrinsically immoral if even the slightest bit of interest were taken on a loan. Other professional activities were not considered so dishonorable, but still, by what right did lawyers and teachers "sell" advice and information? Their knowledge was a gift of God, not a product. Thus, many in the new urban popolo experienced a good deal of religious conflict and anxiety.²²

As the thirteenth century progressed, Franciscan and Dominican theologians developed a new moral theology which, while still condemning their excesses, largely legitimated the new urban professions. They validated the religious experience of their audience, assuring them that they too could find a path to salvation in their way of life. Mercantile activity was justified by the development of a theory of the 'just price': merchants were entitled to a moderate profit, for by transporting and distributing goods they were performing a useful service for the community. They should determine the value of their goods in terms of their usefulness, scarcity, and "delightfulness" (essentially the laws of supply and demand). By a new appreciation of the value of time as a commodity, these theologians were able to argue for the legitimacy of professionals charging fees. Exceptions were even found to the strict condemnation of usury: lenders could charge penalties for damages, delinquency in repayment, and even for the fact that the lender could not benefit by the use of his money in the meantime. 23

At the same time, the friars also challenged the well-to-do to implement Christ's call to "love your neighbor." As Peter John Olivi explained, the rich have a duty to give alms to the poor, who have a right to the superfluities of the wealthy. Indeed, in times of dire need, the state could force the rich to give alms. ²⁴ In practice, the chief means of medieval social relief were the various lay penitential confraternities, most of which were of Franciscan inspiration. A recent dissertation by Jeanette Hurst points out the important role that Franciscans played in communal politics of Italy in the thirteenth century, serving as mediators in civil disputes

and advisors to town governments. For example, St. Anthony was called in by the town council of Padua in 1231 to help draw up a new municipal code. Among other things, it provided release of debtors from prison, advocates for the poor, and a legal process of reconciliation to stem recourse to vendettas. As another Franciscan preacher of the time, Bonaventure of Iseo observed, true love should result in lasting peace with God and neighbor, and a true and lasting peace can be founded only on justice. Affective love leads to effective love, transforming the relationships within society. 25

These reflections on the ministry of the thirteenth century are only a small indication of the tremendous impact the Franciscan movement had on the people of their time. They are not offered as a blueprint for us to replicate. We certainly cannot reproduce — nor should we — the ministerial tactics of a past age. What worked for them might very well be a disaster now. But the goal of these friars of the past — to seize upon the deepest and best hopes of the ordinary people of a society, refusing to succumb to its demonic elements, articulating in their lives, words, and works of service a creative Gospel message of comfort and challenge — all this is still the Franciscan mission. We are heralds of the good news of the kingdom above all; rediscovering this mission will help us decide where to focus our ministerial efforts. Where this may lead us — and it may well lead different communities in different possible directions — I will leave to those of you in the trenches; historians do not necessarily make good prophets.

Certainly, our American cities, like medieval ones, continue to be the cutting edge of our societies. They continue to be the place where those ignorant or alienated from traditional religion congregate. How do we help these people to discover the presence of God in their lives? How do we develop the pastoral theologies to reach out to the divorced and remarried, gay people, and countless others whose life-style puts them at odds with the official theology? How do we challenge people in a very complex ethical environment to be committed to a Gospel of justice and peace? While providing direct services to the poor and marginalized of society will always be a dramatic incarnation of the Franciscan charism, Limust say that I believe Alan McCoy is correct when he tells us that the proximate goal of Franciscan ministry in the United States today is the conversion of the broad middle class. 26 Yes, the city is the place that continues to beckon us in a special way, as it did our medieval brothers and sisters and the 'immigrant' Franciscans in our own country in a very different context. If we can identify with the people and exist for the people. I trust that we too can be just as creative in meeting the task that the Lord is giving us to accomplish.

Endnotes

¹This article is based on two presentations given at the Franciscan Formation Directors Conference, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, July 9, 1990. An earlier version appeared as "What Is Ours to Do? The Roots of Franciscan Ministry," in Friar Lines, a journal of the Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province, vol. 2, n. 3 (1990): 1-20 passim.

²EpLeo, 3 (Francis and Clare, The Complete Works, ed. R. Armstrong and I. Brady, (New York: Paulist, 1982), p. 48.

³2 Cel, 214.

⁴For me, this point has been made convincingly by Mary Jo Leddy, Reweaving Religious Life: Beyond the Liberal Model (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990), pp. 66-78.

⁵This only possible exception is the California province of Friars Minor, where a tiny remnant of friars at Mission Santa Barbara provided a tenuous link with the mission effort of the Spanish colonial era. However, this small community faced almost certain extinction, and so sought incorporation into Sacred Heart Province, a Mid-West German immigrant foundation in 1885, from which base a new Franciscan presence in California resulted.

⁶The Friars Minor date their refounding to the coming of Austrian friars to Cincinnati Province in 1844; Third Order Franciscan brothers arrived in Pennsylvania from Ireland in 1847; the first American Franciscan sisterhood was founded in Milwaukee by Bavarian immigrant women in 1849; German Conventual friars arrived in Texas in 1852, Swiss Capuchins, in Wisconsin, in 1857. The Poor Clares were finally established in Omaha in 1878 by Italian sisters, after a number of abortive foundations in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

⁷For a good popular summary of the ethos of the immigrant church, see F. Michael Perko, Catholic & American: A Popular History (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1989), pp. 131-216.

⁸Again, see Leddy, pp. 17-18.

⁹A good deal of the current discussion has been sparked by Gerald Arbuckle's Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Congregations (New York, Paulist Press, 1988).

¹⁰EpOrd, 5 (Armstrong-Brady, p. 56).

¹¹Art, 83.

¹²Art, 84.

¹³General Chapter Documents, Madrid 1973, par. 14, 36, 26.

14As Francis himself pointed out in Chapter 16 of the Earlier Rule; which is devoted to mission. Cf. William Short, The Franciscans (Wilmington: Clazier, 1989), p. 129: "Mission, in Francis' view, does not mean merely speaking a message, nor even undertaking certain activities. Mission is the revelation of God through living among others in this good world. Living according to the Cospel is always 'missionary,' it reveals who God is."

15A good summary, from which these quotations are taken, is Joseph Chinnici, "Evangelical and Apostolic Tensions," Our Franciscan Charism in the World Today, ed. Alcuin Coyle (Cliffton, N.J., Franciscan Advertising and Media Enterprises, 1987), pp. 96-101.

¹⁶John O'Malley, "Priesthood, Ministry, and Religious Life: Some Historic and Historiographical Considerations," Theological Studies 49 (1988): 223-57.

¹⁷Ibid., 257.

¹⁸Among these I would especially mention, John Fleming, The Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977); J. B. Freed, The Friars and German Society in the Thirteenth Century (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1977); Lester Little, Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978); Michael Mollat, The Poor in the Middle Ages (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), and Daniel Lesnick, Preaching in Medieval Florence (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

¹⁹Lesnick, p. 27.

²⁰Little, p. 173.

²¹Ibid., pp. 162-63; Lesnick, 134-41.

²²Little, pp. 35-41.

²³Ibid., pp. 173-83; cf. Jacques LeGoff, "Trades and Professions as Represented in Medieval Confessors' Manuals," Time, Work, & Culture in the Middle Ages (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 107-121.

²⁴Mollat, pp. 128-34.

²⁵Jeanette Hurst, Franciscan Preaching, Communal Politics, and the Struggle between Papacy and Empire in Northern Italy, 1230 - 1268 (Cornell, 1987).

²⁶Alan McCov, The CORD, 39 (1989).



A Franciscan Approach to Ministry

MICHAEL W. BLASTIC, O.F.M., CONV.

I

It is rather commonplace to hear Franciscans characterize their ministry in terms of "serving the needs of the church." In itself this is an admirable description of what Franciscans do and it captures the important Franciscan value of being connected and obedient to the church in terms of the service it offers. Further, it is general enough in that a variety of forms of ministry can be included within this description. At the same time, however, it allows for the implication that Franciscans are not at all self-directed or self-motivated in the concrete choices made concerning the ministry they do. "To serve the needs of the church" seems to imply that Franciscans exist to do all and whatever the church requests, when the church requests it and how the church requests it. In other words, Franciscans have no ministry proper to themselves except that which the church entrusts to them; it is the church which sets the ministerial agenda for the Franciscans!

Allowing the church to set our agenda has no doubt been at least partly responsible for the problem of clericalization in our history, and at least for the first order today, poses again another danger as the church in North America faces a severe shortage of ordained priests. As more and more parishes become "priestless," the needs of the church become clearer. And if Franciscans do exist to serve the needs of the church, then the ministry of Franciscans will become even more closely linked and identified with parochial, clerical ministry.

Fr. Michael Blastic, OFM Conv., recently completed his doctoral studies at St. Louis University. He teaches courses on Franciscanism at the Washington Theological Union and has been a summer lecturer at the Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University. This insightful paper on Franciscan ministry is one of the three delivered at the Franciscan Formation Directors Conference in July of last year.

In addition to this attitude concerning the ministry of Franciscans in particular, the discussion of ministry in general has become almost paralyzed by the paradigm of the sacramental ministry of the ordained. A case in point is a work of the theologian Richard McBrien in which he offers the following definition of Christian ministry:

Christian/specific ministry is a Christian service rendered in the name of the Church and for the sake of its mission, rooted in some act of designation by the Church, and to be done by relatively few members of the Church. ¹

Ministry as public service for the sake of the mission of the church as servant of the Kingdom, and ministry as that which is officially designated such by the church reflects the paradigm of the sacrament of Holy Orders which sets men apart for sacramental service. It is not an exercise of the common priesthood of the faithful which is invoked, but the difference which results from public designation that here characterizes ministry. Without public designation by the church, there is no ministry in the strict sense.

McBrien's definition of ministry, as well as the definitions offered by other theologians and bishops, operates out of an ecclesial understanding which places much more weight on the tradition of ministry inherited from the past than from the present tradition of experience of today's ministers themselves who are already giving shape to the church of tomorrow. This becomes especially problematic and tension-ridden in that the Kingdom of God, which ministry exists to serve, it not yet given in its full and final form. What is experienced of the Kingdom today is only tentative because the Kingdom is an eschatological reality. Thus, our definitions of ministry, even our ecclesial definitions, are tentative. In this sense, it is not surprising that much tension surrounds the issue of ministry in the church. And Franciscans are not immune from this experience of tension when it comes to defining their ministry in the church for the sake of the Kingdom!

II

Francis himself was not free of the tension which surrounded the issue of ministry within his fraternity. An indication of this tension is given by Jordan of Giano who reported that while Francis was in Syria a number of disturbances had rocked the Order in his absence. First it was reported to Francis that the ministers had adopted new constitutions which regulated the life of the fraternity according to the paradigm of monastic life in terms of fasting and abstinence, thus "modifying" the Rule in this regard. In addition, Brother Philip had obtained letters of protection from the Roman Curia for the Poor Ladies contrary to the spirit of humility

which Francis desired. And finally, Brother John of Capella seemingly attempted to define and limit the ministry of the fraternity to the service of lepers by writing the new rule. ¹ Each of these incidents threatened the integrity of the fraternity according to the mind of Francis.

It is important to note that these three incidents threatened three aspects of the life of the brotherhood which Francis held to be essential to the living of the Gospel. In imposing new constitutions on the fraternity the ministers were attempting to institutionalize the order according to the existing ecclesial model of the monastic and canonical traditions, which for Francis, was tantamount to extinguishing the source of the Franciscan charism as expressed in his inspiration to live according to the form of the holy Gospel. The letters of protection requested for the Poor Sisters from the Curia directly challenged the central foundation for the Franciscan charism in absolute trust in God's providence. The attempt to identify the fraternity with a specific ministry, even that of service to the lepers as important as it was to Francis himself, threatened that openness to the inspiration of the Lord which defined the vocation of Francis and hence of each friar and of the entire fraternity.

In addition to these difficulties which the friars themselves experienced in living according to the form of the holy Gospel, the church too attempted to assimilate the Franciscan movement within its hierarchical structures as evidenced by the willingness of the Curia to provide letters of protection as Jordan of Giano remarked. Thus both the friars and the church had difficulty in understanding just what the Franciscan movement was all about.

An episode recounted in the Assisi Compilation speaks to this issue. In the light of attempts by both the friars and the cardinal protector to convince Francis to change course and adopt a tried and true way of life in the church, Francis addressed the chapter with the following words:

My brothers! My brothers! God has called me by way of simplicity and shown me the way of simplicity. I do not want you to name any Rule to me, not St. Augustine's, nor St. Bernard's, nor St. Benedict's. The Lord said to me that he wished that I should be a new-born simpleton in the world (novellus pazzus in mundo). God did not want to lead us by another way than by this kind of learning, but God will confound you through your learning and your wisdom.³

The difficulty which both the friars and the church faced in Francis was precisely the novelty or newness of his vision for the Order. For this reason, because Francis was convinced that God called him to be this "new-born simpleton," both the structures from the past in terms of monastic/canonical life and the practical responses of the present in terms of letters of protection from the curia or an univocal ministerial function

for the Order, would not do. Neither of these options was a real choice for Francis as both limited God's freedom in directing and developing the Order. Francis' religious experience was absolutely original. As Giovanni Miccoli remarks, "Francis in effect lived a religious experience which, as far as its essential core is concerned, had no link or reference to the ecclesiastical tradition of his time." This original religious experience touched on not only how the friars lived, but also on what the friars would do in terms of ministry. This sense of being something novel and new is an essential aspect of the Franciscan charism and patrimony and is as central to living the Franciscan life today as are fraternity and poverty. Having already existed for some 780 years does not diminish the innate challenge of Francis' charism to realize even today that newness in the world!

III

While Francis refused the identification of the Order with a particular ministry and while he does not define specific ministries as being proper to the Order, he does give clear indications of the parameters of ministry for his movement. In his Major Life of St. Francis' Bonaventure describes a personal crisis which Francis experienced about the direction of his life. It had to do with the desire of Francis for solitary prayer to the point where he felt forced to choose between it and the active ministry of preaching. Bonaventure recounts the argument which convinced Francis to return to an active life of preaching:

But there is one thing to the contrary, that seems to outweigh all these considerations before God, namely that the only begotten Son of God, who is the highest wisdom, came down from the bosom of the Father for the sake of souls in order to instruct the world with his example and to speak the word of salvation to men, whom he would redeem with the price of his sacred blood, cleanse with its washing and nourish with its draught, holding back for himself absolutely nothing that he could freely give for our salvation. And because we should do everything according to the pattern shown to us in him as on the heights of the mountain, it seems more pleasing to God that I interrupt my quiet and go out to labor. 5

Francis was convinced that he was called to follow the pattern of Jesus Christ who embraced the world in the Incarnation, freely surrendering everything in humility and compassion for the sake of salvation.

Francis first learned of this pattern of life in his experience with the leper which he describes in the first lines of his *Testament*. The young merchant Francis, accustomed to the good life and fine foods and clothes and wealth and friends, came face to face with ugliness, filth, stench, disease, loneliness and poverty in the leper he embraced. Francis re-

marked that after embracing the leper, however, "that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of body and soul." It was, as Francis describes, an experience of grace! But what is most significant about this experience is the conviction that it was "the Lord Himself" who led Francis to the leper. This is perhaps the clearest description by Francis of what it means to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

For Francis the logic is clear. As God moves toward the world and humanity in the humility of the Incarnation, Francis moves in humility to embrace the world in the leper. And in embracing the leper Francis embraces Christ. It is ultimately this humility of God which captivates Francis' body and soul and defines what Francis means when he states again in the *Testament* that the Lord called him to "live according to the form of the Holy Gospel." It is not the Incarnation in general, the fact simply that God becomes human in Jesus, but more importantly, it is the pattern of life, the form of life which Jesus embraced that defines the Franciscan following of Christ. As Francis indicates in his own words:

Through his angel Saint Gabriel, the most High Father in heaven announced this word of the Father — so worthy, so holy and glorious — in the womb of the holy and glorious Virgin Mary, from which he received the flesh of humanity and our frailty. Though he was rich beyond all things, in this world, He willed to choose poverty. 6

What characterizes Francis' Christocentrism is its concrete realism: Jesus does not take on any human flesh, but frail flesh, weak flesh, humble and poor flesh, transient flesh. Again, it is not merely the Incarnation as a concept which captures Francis' attention, but rather the *modality* of the Incarnation, God's movement in humility toward the world, which describes and defines the nature of the Franciscan following of Christ. In the Incarnation, Jesus embraces the world as it is, the real world, with all of its saints and sinners, its darkness and light, its error and its truth.

What is at stake here in this for Francis is nothing less than the truth. The truth which Francis discovers and comes to live is that the leper is Christ and the leper's world is God's world. This is what the Incarnation reveals to Francis: in turning toward those around him, Francis turns toward God. In turn, it is this turning toward others which gives power to Francis word and allows him to be heard. This is what the life of penance is all about: it is not a private affair nor is it something I do for myself. Penance is something that God does for me in turning me toward others — "The Lord himself led me among them!"

This explains Francis' great love for the feast of Christmas and his desire to celebrate the feast with great solemnity by feeding the poor and even the birds of the air:

For Saint Francis had a greater regard for Christmas than for any other

other festivals, yet, because he was born for us, as St. Francis used to say, it was His concern to save us (Assisi Compilation, 110).

This is why the celebration at Grecchio was so important for Francis. Thomas of Celano says as much when he explains that Francis wished to recall to memory the child born at Bethlehem in order to "set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs..." (1 Celano 85). The crib at Grecchio reminds humanity of where God is to be found, in the fragile flesh of an infant. Francis' invitation and challenge is to see the mystery, to see the truth about human life in the world, and to see God's concrete embrace of it in the Incarnation.

This is also why the Eucharist plays such a central role in Francis' life and religious experience because the Eucharist is all about seeing the truth in faith. Francis challenges his followers in the first Admonition:

Why do you not recognize the truth and believe in the Son of God? See, daily he humbles himself as when He came from the royal throne into the womb of the virgin; daily he comes to us in a humble form; daily he comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest. And as he appeared to the holy apostles in true flesh, so now he reveals Himself to us in the sacred bread (Admonition I: 14-19)

Francis here insists on seeing the visible mystery of God's humility. Reflecting somewhat the eucharistic piety of his day which focussed on seeing the elevated host and chalice as the means of salvation, Francis transforms this piety in the direction of mission and ministry. The Eucharist becomes Francis' plan of action as it celebrates the world becoming the Kingdom. As a result, Francis will demand that his brothers,

show all possible reverence and honor to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom that which is in the heavens and on the earth is brought to peace and is reconciled to the all powerful God (Letter to the Entire Order, 12 - 13).

As the bread and wine are transsubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ the truth is revealed, the truth is made manifest to human eyes. God embraces the world as well as the work of humanity in transforming the world into the Kingdom. Thus, Franciscan mission and ministry is

defined by seeing, following, and becoming the mystery of God present before our eyes. This is what Francis' Canticle of Brother Sun celebrates—the mystery of cosmic reconciliation. God's creation models true fraternity. The challenge is to become what we see in the world and to participate in creation's hymn of praise to the extent that we pardon, forgive and live in humility.

All of this leads to the following description of Franciscan ministry as "following Jesus in the real world," or to use Francis' own self-description, "becoming new-born simpleton's in the world." Clare of Assisi captures the sense of this best when she states that "The Son of God has been made for us the Way, which our blessed father Francis, His true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example" (Clare's Testament, 5). Following Jesus the Way means to embrace the world in humility as God embraced the world in the Incarnation. Following Jesus the Way means allowing God to turn us to everyone and everything which surrounds us in the world, which is of the essence of the life of Penance. It is not so much a static model of an ideal Jesus as it is rather the pattern, the dynamic form of the Gospel which is represented to us by Jesus' own embrace of the lives of men and women and creation itself in the Incarnation which defines the Franciscan following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Where are these footprints of Jesus Franciscans are called to follow? As Francis' own example of life demonstrates, they are found in the real world, the world as it is, the human world with all of its joys and sorrows, its brokenness and pain, its poverty and its wealth, its light and its darkness, with all of its victories and defeats. Franciscan mission means to go about this world and embrace it as Jesus did. Francis never speaks of a mission to the church, but rather of a mission to the world which is becoming the Kingdom!

Based on what has been said to this point, Franciscan ministry, as the means of expressing this mission, can be further characterized in three ways. First, Franciscan ministry is preeaching. As Francis stated, "All the brothers, however, should preach by their deeds" (Earlier Rule, XVII:3). The model envisioned here by Francis is not that of liturgical preaching, but preaching as a way of life, an activity, an engagement with the world. This kind of preaching names grace in human experience, reveals the presence of God in the world, and is only possible to the extent that one turns toward those people one meets, wherever and whenever they are met. This Franciscan preaching points out the truth which lies sometimes just beyond sight, and helps one to see God in reality. This preaching is Eucharistic in that it calls forth the proclamation of the world becoming the Kingdom. It is above all a positive word about how God is active in human experience, not a negative word which speaks the absence of God from human lives.

Second, Franciscan ministry is evangelical in the full sense of the term. It responds to the Gospel injunction to go into the whole world and preach the Good News. The real world becomes the focus for Franciscan ministry for it is in the real world that the footprints of Jesus are to be found and followed. There are no boundaries, ecclesial or otherwise, to this mission as it is the world which sets the Franciscan agenda.

Third, Franciscan ministry is presence. The Franciscan is called in the words of David Flood to "sit down at table and get into people's lives." Ministry does not bring God to a people or a place suffering God's absence. The Franciscan minister is called to recognize Jesus who goes before us in the world. Ministry is the engagement of human lives which results in the shared experience of God's presence, and is the fruit of Penance, of turning toward those around us.

V

All of this leads to the clarification that to define Franciscan ministry as simply that which serves the needs of the church is to drastically alter Francis' own understanding of the mission and ministry of Franciscans. To be sure, Francis insisted on obedience to the church. But this did not mean for Francis that the church determined the ministerial agenda of the Order. The world extends beyond the boundaries of the church. It is that entire world which God embraced in the Incarnation. It is that world which Franciscans today are called to embrace.

That there will be, as there were, tensions which result from this call to ministry in the real world is inevitable. There will be tension between what the church determines its needs to be and the concrete choices of particular forms of Franciscan ministry which are determined by going about the world. The church too is called to minister to the needs of the world and has responded to these needs in many ways. But, the world continued to remain bigger than the church, and here too God goes before us calling Franciscans in a particular way to respond to God's presence by following in the footsteps of Jesus even beyond the limits of the church.

This fundamental intuition of the mission and ministry of Franciscans is captured by one of the earliest Franciscan texts to appear after the writings of Francis himself. The Sacrum Commercium records the dialogue between Lady Poverty and the friars after they had shared a frugal meal. When Lady Poverty rises from a peaceful sleep,

She quickly arose and asked to be shown the cloister. Taking her to a certain hill they showed her the whole world, as far as she could see, and said: "This, Lady, is our cloister."

The pattern of this has been revealed to Francis by God in moving toward the world in the humility of the Incarnation. To be faithful to this pattern which describes the Franciscan vocation, Franciscan ministry demands nothing less than following Jesus in the real world!

Endnotes

¹Richard McBrien, Ministry: A Theological, Pastoral Handbook (San Francisco: Harper & Row): 22.

²See The Chronicle of Jordan of Giano, par. 12 - 16.

³Assisi Compilation, 114. Rosalind Brooke, ed. & trans., Scripta Leonis, Rufini et Angeli Sociorum S. Francisci (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970): 289.

⁴G. Miccoli, "Francis of Assisi's Christian Proposal," Greyfriars Review 3 (1989): 131.

⁵Bonaventure, Major Life of St. Francis, XII:1; Ewert Cousins, trans., Bonaventure (New York: Paulist Press, 1978): 292-293.

⁶Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 4.

⁷David Flood, "Assisi's Rules and People's Needs: The Initial Determination of the Franciscan Mission." Franziskanische Studien 66 (1984): 93.

⁸Sacrum Commercium, 63.

Trees

(Adapted from TREES by Joyce Kilmer)

I think that I shall never see A poem ugly as a tree. A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed Against our earth's polluted breast.

A tree that looked to God one day, Now has no leafy arms to pray. A tree that must in summer wear The same sad look as winter... bare.

Upon whose stump no snow has lain,
A freak, a tree that can't use rain
For it has suffered crass destruction
For man's mis-named asset called construction.

Poems are made by fools like me, But only God can replace that tree.

Sr. Mary Clare Heath, O.S.F.

Ministry Today and Tomorrow

ROSEMARY CHINNICI, S.L.

The following letter was addressed to Ann Landers December 3, 1980.

"Dear Ann:

I'll bet you've had it with the secretaries who resent being asked to get coffee for the boss, but please hear me out. I get coffee not only for my boss but several other bosses in this office. This means collecting money, getting the paper cups and plastic spoons, making the coffee and serving it, cleaning the urn—along with a cheerful "Good morning" for everyone who comes in.

I love it! It's not a chore. It's a ministry. Some people say thanks, others don't. But I don't care. I don't need praise. I do this simple chore because it makes me feel good to be of service to others. Sign me — a Very happy secretary in Columbus, Ohio."

Ann responds: "Hello, Mary Sunshine! A 'ministry' yet. I'm glad you didn't sign your name. Knowing your identity would be more responsibility than I want. Too many secretaries out there would cheerfully strangle you, dear. Thanks for letting me know you exist. You're the last of a vanishing breed."

Every year, in the *Introduction to Ministry* class that I teach at the Franciscan School of Theology, in Berkeley, California, I ask students to discuss whether this woman is in fact engaged in ministry. Their answers are amazing:

Some say it is ministry because the secretary says it is; Some say it is ministry because she does it *cheerfully*; Students have told me it's not ministry because she gets paid for it;

One student, rather unenlightened about the women's movement, told me it was ministry because it is a secretary's job to get coffee for her bosses!

The CORD is happy to publish this article which is based on a talk delivered by Sister Rosemary Chinnici at the Franciscan Formation Conference held at St. Bonaventure University in July, 1990. Sister Rosemary is Professor of Pastoral Theology at the Franciscan School of Theology Berkeley, California.

... to understand ministry is to be involved in an attitude of mutuality towards others.

After they wrestle with this question for awhile, I then read them the following article:

"Sister Angela has an unusual ministry — she cuts hair for shut-ins, including inmates in the Contra Costa jail.

The licensed cosmetologist with 1,600 hours of training says she finds it 'very stimulating' meeting all of the interesting boys in the jail. According to Peter Christiansen, managing director of the Friends Outside chapter here, 'Inmates think the world of her. She's a super woman who relates to these guys and they line up- for her to cut their hair.'

'As a child,' Sister Angela says, 'I had two dreams — to be a beautician and to be a nun, so now both dreams have come true. There's no formal counseling involved in my work but I like talking with the inmates. We talk about religion, about hair styling, sports, families, and problems — they just like to talk. When they are with me they get all of the attention and I know I am ministering for these boys in a human way and that makes me feel better too."²

The students have less trouble with Sister Angela. They almost always agree that she is performing ministry — after all, she is a religious, doing volunteer work, even some counseling, in a prison, and it is clear the inmates appreciate her availability.

A variety of issues about ministry are raised by these two articles and I would like to spend some time discussing some of them.

The first point may seem somewhat surprising but it is extremely important. No one agrees on the definition of ministry. Certainly many books have been written on the subject: The Rebirth of Ministry, Future Stages of Ministry, Ministry In Transition, How the Church can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself, Competent Ministry, Creative Ministry to name just a few. None of these books, however, actually provides a working definition of ministry or an agreed-upon definition.

There are "models" of ministry, "theologies" of ministry. People in religious communities engage in what seem like eternal conversations about the unique "ministry" of their order. We even used the word to tempt you to come to these talks. Yet the truth is we could go around this room and there would be as many different definitions as there are people. The actual truth is "ministry" is one of the most over-used and potentially meaningless words in our theological vocabulary.

My students, or people entering religious formation, do not like to

believe this fact. They shouldn't. After all, they are lay and religious men and women who have set aside two, three or four years of their life to prepare for service in the Church. If there is no one meaning to the word ministry there may not be meaning to their future work.

As a consequence, they insist that they know the meaning of the word. Nine times out of ten, when asked to define the word, they supply definitions related to service:

"ministry" is service to God's people;

"ministry" is when I'm open to meeting the needs of others just as Jesus did;

"ministry" is graced servanthood.

Yet, there are a variety of problems when we equate ministry with service.

The first is that "ministry" becomes whatever we want it to be. As long as we try to do a good job, be of service, we are "ministering." In this schema, there is no room for failure. Things do not work out because "the people were not ready for it" or "it was not a good community to begin with." We are always successful because we want to be of service. Yet we know that this is not true — we know we fail and that others fail us. As long as ministry is defined by the person supposedly performing the activity we will never have a worthwhile critique of our own actions and we will not understand our potential for failure.

The second problem encountered when we equate "ministry" with service is that this is actually antithetical to our experience. We have all had moments of being touched by another — being graced. The person did not necessarily know what they were doing, in fact they may never have defined their actions as "being of service." Yet we were truly moved by their actions. We know ministry because we encounter it. It therefore becomes a strange twist to experience when we define it from the point of view of the actor rather than the recipient. If we were to discuss "ministry" from our actual experience we would talk about "receiving grace," "being touched," "experiencing God." When we equate "ministry" with our service rather than our experience it becomes self-limiting. As long as we make our work "holy" the expansiveness of creation disappears and there is no longer any room for God, grace, or Christ. "Ministry" is what we say it is. We control the "ministry" but, unfortunately, this makes it limited by our fragile selves.

A third problem in defining ministry as service is that, in actuality, service is simply another term for job. Because this is difficult for us to admit, we find ourselves in the strange position of having to "baptize" our work. I submit to you that if we wanted to be more honest with ourselves we would stop proliferating types of "ministry" — "sacerdotal ministry," "minister of the word," "minister of hospitality" — and acknowledge our jobs as honest attempts to respond to the Gospel call.

Defining ministry as service or as job also raises the question of what message is given to people who are no longer able to participate in meaningful employment. In the Directory for my Religious Community we have placed people's work after their name. Those who were retired complained about this because they said it looked like they were no longer worthwhile. So we changed the directory and now, after their names, we have people listed as engaged in the work of "prayer and suffering." While these elderly sisters may indeed be engaged in prayer and suffering, I still think we are continuing the subtle message that self-esteem is based on an activity rather than an innate worth. Surely all of these sisters participate in the creative goodness of Christ, and this dynamism occurs whether they are "of service" or not. If we were to no longer define ministry in terms of service what replacement ideas would be available to us. In the time remaining I would like to discuss three alternatives:

Carter Heyward in her book The Redemption of God talks about two types of power available to us in our lives — the power of exousia and the power of dunamis ³Exousia is the power given to us by legitimate authority to operate within a certain role. As a teacher I have the power of exousia — I operate within a certain role in my classroom. The power of dunamis, however, is the force from within, the liberating and creative spark that is in each of us, is good, and in mutuality, is able to touch the essence of another person. It is dunamis that actually allows me to teach a student. Exousia is proscribed by limitations — I have the power to say yes or no to you and establish boundaries for you. Dunamis is expanded by freedom — I have the power to say yes to you and, in mutuality, enable both of us to grow. Interestingly, Jesus did not have the power of exousia, he had no official authority or role. He did, however, have the power of dunamis, the ability to creatively touch others.

Certainly every person in any position or role of service has power—and when we define ministry as our service to another we can over-identify with the institution we represent. When this happens we can arrive at the point where we are so identified with our role in the institution that we operate only out of our exousia power. We come to believe our exercise of power is justified, even when it is power over another, power that violates the dignity of another. We have all seen this type of power in action. In formation it may appear in the words "trust me, it is good for you to do this." In churches it can appear by ignoring the pain of women, and refusing to use inclusive language. We might decide against taking an unpopular stand because we are afraid of sanctions from others in authority.

Dunamis power, on the other hand, is not service, it is mutuality, the equal exchange of creative freedom. One example of this type of mutual exchange of power is found in Heyward's explanation of the woman with

a hemorrhage. ⁴ There is a mutual exchange of power between the woman and Jesus. In her courage and trust she reaches out to Jesus and is healed. The woman claimed for herself the power of *dunamis*, the power to exist in relation. Because of this she was healed. Jesus recognized this intimacy because He Himself possessed the same creative power of *dunamis*. Between the two of them there is a mutual exchange of love: the woman receives healing from this encounter, Jesus receives affirmation for His mission. This is the creative exchange of grace that is known to us when we experience "ministry."

Another example of this same type of mutual exchange can be seen in the life of a woman that I know. She is afflicted with chronic mental illness, cannot work, and every day confronts extreme bouts of depression. She has never committed suicide — a gift of hope that I consider extremely courageous and moves me greatly. In one of my classes I tell students about her psychological battles and she finds this extremely encouraging because she finds it difficult to believe she is worthwhile enough to be used as an example of anything. Between us we have a mutual exchange of grace — something I do not understand but is one of the closest things to experiencing ministry that I can imagine.

A second alternative image helpful in thinking about ministry can be found in the curse of the werewolf. Wolfbane is the name of a flower and the original curse is: "when the wolfbane blooms and the moon is high, even the pure of heart can become a werewolf." We know this happens. Ministers abuse their power by taking sexual advantage of parishioners; messages of guilt and shame are laid upon those deemed "outsiders" — gays, lesbians, the divorced, the homeless; we all know of times when we have become tired and cynical. And we know that this happens even though we try to be pure of heart.

Adolph Guggenbuhl-Craig in his book *Power in the Helping Profession*⁵ explains this abuse of power as a time when we "split" off one of the central archetypes in our lives. He uses as his example the myth of the "wounded healer."

Mythologically, the original wounded healer was Charon, the centaur, who, as he traveled throughout the countryside healing others, bled from a small wound in his left heel. Eventually, in his desire to heal others, he himself bled to death.

Craig suggests that when we split this archetype, identify with only the healer part of ourselves and not the wounded part, we will become cold toward others. The division will result in a lack of empathy, such a strong belief in our personal power to heal that we lost contact with the other person.

The truth is there is not a helping person in the world who at one time or another will not be seized by the curse of the werewolf. The wolfbane does bloom, the moon is high and even though we are pure of heart we often fail. If we can remember this we will stay in touch with our own wounds and will be able to act out of the *dunamis* of mutuality. If we forget it we will be limited by the *exousia* of our roles and, despite our best efforts, find ourselves abusing others.

Finally, I would like to suggest to you that an appreciation of "ministry" involves a willingness to live in a certain amount of tension or not knowing. There is value in Matthew 25: 31-46. When we speak about ministry as though it were a service or job it sounds like we actually know when it is occurring. If we are to take this text seriously we learn that we will be surprised about our actions. Even though we are good people we will have to ask when we "ministered." "Then the just will ask him: 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you or see you thirsty and give you drink? When did we welcome you away from home or clothe you in vour nakedness. When did we visit you when you were ill or in prison? The King will answer them: 'I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least sisters or brothers, you did it for me.' I submit to you that this is as it should be. It is extremely dangerous to know the workings of "ministry." If we knew how to "do it" we would try to control it and would come to believe that it is we not Christ who is involved in making up the fullness of time.

So — I have just delivered a talk without giving a definition of ministry. Obviously this is on purpose. The best I can offer you is my belief that to understand ministry is to be involved in an attitude of mutuality towards others. Bernie Loomer, the process theologian, says it best:

"We must concern ourselves with size. Size is the stature of a person's soul. The range and depth of her/his love. Their capacity for relationships. The volume of life you can both take into your being and still maintain your integrity and individuality. It is the interest and variety of outlook you can maintain without being defensive or insecure. Size is the range of your limitations. By size I mean that strength of spirit to encourage others to become freerer in the development of their diversity and uniqueness. The power to sustain more complex and more enriching tensions. I mean the magnanimity of concern to provide conditions that enable others to increase in stature."

The following questions were used for discussion after the presentation:

1. A person's understanding of "vocation" often affects their understanding of "ministry..." "... I have a vocation therefore what I do is ministry." What would happen to a sense of personal vocation if people understood ministry as an attitude rather than a function?

2. How do we violate our power as formation directors?

3. Defining an action as "ministry" rather than as a "job" helps elevate

one's sense of importance and contribute to a we/they split. How can we help those in formation to be more honest about naming their work for what it is?

4. How can formation programs help develop a "spirituality of tension" that allows students to live in the real world and not rely on "acts of ministry" as the basis for self-esteem?

5. Mutuality is the point where an "exchange of grace" occurs. How can formation programs help students learn to appreciate and experience the value of relationship/friendship?

Endnotes

¹San Francisco Chronicle, December 3, 1980.

²Oakland Tribune, no date, circa 1984.

³Hayward, Carter. The Redemption of God: A Theology of Mutual Relation (Washington: University Press of America, 1982.)

4. Ibid., p-g. 46.

5. Guggenbuhl-Craig, Adolf. Power in the Helping Profession, (Dallas: Spring Publication, Inc., 1971.)

6. Loomer, Bernard. "S-I-Z-E Is the Measure". Religious Experience and Process Theology. Ed. Harry Cargas and Bernard Lee (New York: Paulist Press, 1972.) Reprinted from Criterion, Spring 1974, pg. 70.



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