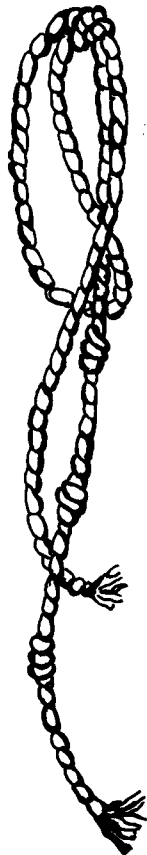


SEPTEMBER, 1993

The CORD

A FRANCISCAN SPIRITUAL REVIEW



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The CORD

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Standard Abbreviations used in The CORD for Early Franciscan Sources

I. Writings of Saint Francis

Adm: Admonitions	Fragm: Another Fragment, Rule of 1221
BenLeo: Blessing for Brother Leo	LaudDei: Praises of the Most High God
CantSol: Canticle of Brother Sun	LaudHor: Praises at all the Hours
EpAnt: Letter to St. Anthony	OffPass: Office of the Passion
EpCler: Letter to Clerics ¹	OrCruc: Prayer before the Crucifix
EpCust: Letter to Superiors ¹	RegB: Rule of 1223
EpFid: Letter to All the Faithful ¹	RegNB: Rule of 1221
EpLeo: Letter to Brother Leo	RegEr: Rule for Hermits
EpMin: Letter to a Minister	SalBMV: Salutation to our Lady
EpOrd: Letter to the Entire Order	SalVirt: Salutation to the Virtues
EpRect: Letter to the Rulers of the People	Test: Testament of St. Francis
ExhLD: Exhortation to the Praise of God	UltVol: Last Will Written for Clare
ExpPat: Exposition on the Our Father	VPLaet: Treatise on True and Perfect Joy
Form Viv: Form of Life for St. Clare	¹ I, II refer to First and Second Editions.

II. Other Early Franciscan Sources

1Cel: Celano, First Life of Francis	LM: Bonaventure, Major Life of Francis
2Cel: Celano, Second Life of Francis	LMin: Bonaventure Minor Life of Francis
3Cel: Celano, Treatise on Miracles	LP: Legend of Perugia
CL: Legend of Saint Clare	L3S: Legend of the Three Companions
CP: Process of Saint Clare	SC Sacrum Commercium
Fior: Little Flowers of St. Francis	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).

Consecration — Transformation: A Homily

HERMANN SCHALÜCK, OFM

After a day dedicated especially to prayer and penance we have come now to our eucharistic liturgy to thank our God for today and for so many other things for which we believe we must be grateful. Our THEME for the liturgy is CONSECRATION — TRANSFORMATION.

Consecration indicates the total dedication of a person or thing to God. The most common application of this term is to the bread and wine that is transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus at the Eucharist. This is the sign, par excellence, for us of our consecration through Baptism for in the liturgy of the Eucharist, we recall the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus, and we share the bread and wine transformed into his Body and Blood for the salvation of the world; and in the Eucharist we offer ourselves through him, with him and in him hoping for our transformation.

Transformation in its basic meaning implies change, and in our Christian context it is change for the better and is concerned with the conversion process in which we are involved from the moment we are baptized. Baptism is the fundamental sacrament of personal consecration. Vows taken in a religious community further dedicate a person to the service of God's people in a particular congregation ratified by the authority of the Church. Baptism is therefore above all, the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ.

Fidelity to the consequences of our divine consecration in Baptism and to our human dedication through Religious Profession is promised again when we share

This homily was delivered to the General Assembly of the Third Order Regular during the eucharistic celebration on May 20th of this year in the Basilica of St. Francis at Assisi. Over 200 sisters and brothers from 32 countries participated in the International Franciscan Conference-TOR. The CORD is grateful to Fr. Hermann Schalück, General Minister of the Order of Friars Minor, for permitting us to publish his homily in this special edition. Sr. Kathleen Moffatt, Executive Director of the Franciscan Federation, deserves our heartfelt thanks for assembling the materials for the September issue of the CORD.

in the Eucharist and brings about a transformation in our lives that makes us authentic Christians who give credible witness to the People of God. The reading from Acts in today's Eucharist gives an example of this in the account of Paul's fidelity among the people of Corinth. We see Paul as zealous, ready and willing to work at his trade, single-minded about Christ, dedicated to preaching Christ.

"The people of the household (where he stayed) all became believers in the Lord. A great many Corinthians who had heard him became believers and were baptized."

Receiving Baptism and accepting the consequences means that we try, in spite of our human limitations, to be authentic signs of Church, and healthy, active members of the Body of Christ. For this we must be ready to be possessed by the Spirit of God, and transformed into other Christs, exercising and sharing in his priesthood, his prophetic role and his teaching mission. Everyone of us is consecrated for this through Baptism, and we find our own particular way to respond to this great privilege and responsibility.

We who follow St. Francis follow what we call the Franciscan Way by professing publicly to live a simple lifestyle based on the Gospel. It is through this that we hope to be changed into what God wants us to be. The conversion process which opens our hearts and minds more and more to the gentle influence of the Holy Spirit introduces us gradually to the person of Jesus and our growing recognition and friendship with him transform us into Disciples who are new beings with new freedom, and new life.

Today's gospel passage is a realistic reminder to us that there is a price to be paid, in that we must die before we can live. Each of us must identify with the crucified Christ who has paid the price so that we too may become Resurrection People.

"You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy."

Consecrated in Baptism, dedicated through profession, and transformed by the Spirit as we continue to offer ourselves, we have this joy of knowing that people hearing us and seeing us will come to believe in Christ or be confirmed in their faith.

The notion of conversion, perhaps, carries with it more emphasis on the human efforts we make to find God, while transformation implies the love and peace and joy of the Christian who experiences the presence and power of a loving God, the Christian who has a reflective awareness of the divine presence and lives in patient expectation of further revelation of the divine in the ordinary everyday things of life.

We all know so well how this conversion process transformed Francis into "another Christ," beginning with such incidents as the encounter with the leper. We have had our own grace-laden encounters, and will have more. Each one of these in some way asks us to step aside to let the Lord move in. As his presence grows, so does our transformation for it is he who is becoming more and more manifest.

And so we reflect regularly on our Baptism to learn more and more about who we really are — God's People. We contemplate the person of Jesus who came to serve not to be served, as we live out our dedication to the service of the People of God; and we look forward in joyful hope to ever new ways of meeting our God and bringing others to him.

I would like to offer you two suggestions for reflection: one is from the Admonitions of St. Francis where he gives us a beautiful example of the peace and love that comes to the soul transformed by the work of the Spirit as the gifts of that same Spirit become Christian virtues which replace the vices to which we are all prone.

When your life is centered on love and you are being taught by God, you will really have nothing to fear; and you will come to know all you need to know.

When you are patient and humble, you will not be aggressively angry or a disturber of the peace.

When you are content to accept your human limitations and joyfully admit your need for God, greedy desire will not have you hankering after what others have.

When you are calm and give yourself to contemplation, you will not let restlessness and curiosity make you deviate from your true path.

When the fear of the Lord sets the theme of your thinking, you will not give a hearing to the harmful suggestions of the worldly person.

When you are compassionate and use good judgment, you will not exaggerate things or be slow to forgive.

The second suggestion for reflection is in the form of a prayer asking that we be always, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, young-hearted and light-footed, free to let go of old securities and ever ready for adventure — a necessary transformation in the Church, religious life and in individuals.

"Comfortable and well-worn are my daily paths whose edges have grown gray with constant use. My daily speech is a collection of old words worn down at the heels by repeated use. My language and deeds, addicted to habit, prefer the taste of old wine, the feel of weathered skin.

Come and awaken me, Spirit of the new. Come and refresh me, Creator of green life. Come and inspire me, Risen Son, you who make all things new: I am too young to be dead, to be stagnant in spirit.

High are the walls that guard the old, the tired and secure ways of yesterday, that protect me from the dreaded plague, the feared heresy of change. For all change is a danger to the trusted order, the threadbare traditions that are maintained by the narrow ruts of rituals.

Yet how can an everlastingly new covenant retain its freshness and vitality without injections of the new, the daring and the untried?

Come, O you who are ever new; wrap my heart in new skin, ever flexible to be reformed by your Spirit. Set my feet to fresh paths this day; inspire me to speak original and life-giving words and creatively to give shape to the new.

Come and teach me how to dance with delight whenever you send a new melody my way."

Contemporary Franciscan Woman, an Image of God

ROSE FERNANDO, FMM

"Woman, an image of God / Contemporary Franciscan Woman facing today's challenges along with her brothers" is the topic on which I have been invited to speak. We have listened to presentations on Mary and Clare, and we have seen how they were able to accomplish their mission, because their constant contemplation of God helped them to image the true God, revealed in and through women.

The scenario of 13th century Assisi was not very different from the scenario today: political tensions and wars, violence and bloodshed, class differences and divisions, the oppressive rich and the oppressed poor, the "center" and the "periphery," the secondary role of women. However, the situation today is even more critical because of the highly bureaucratic interplay between technology, politics, and economics. Theologically and ecclesiologically, now as then, we operate from an incomplete image of God and Church. Francis and Clare are "called" and "sent" to the thirteenth century Assisi and Church. They respond with faith and courage, with daring and prophetism.

Until recently, we drew our inspiration mainly from the Scriptures, and from the life and writings of St. Francis of Assisi. Today, in addition to the above, we also have as companion for our journey, the first Franciscan woman, Clare, whose faith and courage, daring and prophetism are reflected:

- in her integrated understanding of gospel poverty, personal and communal, and its total permeation in all of life
- in her struggle to preserve the unity of mutual love
- in her sense of discernment and co-responsibility, in community and as church
- in her search for a *new form of religious life*, and the responsibility she assumed for the legal and canonical consequences of her choice.¹

Sister Rose Fernando is the Director of the newly organized Office of Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation for the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary at their Generalate in Rome. The Congregation numbers over 7500 Sisters in more than 70 countries throughout the world.

Here we present the powerful, inspiring, and challenging presentation that Sister Rose offered at the Third General Assembly of the International Franciscan Conference-TOR, held in Assisi in May of this year.

We see reflected today a similar faith and courage, prophetism and daring, in contemporary Franciscan women, who seek to be faithful to the Franciscan vocation, as we journey further into the 90s.

From Exclusion to Inclusion



Within themselves, let them always make a dwelling place and home for the Lord God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that with undivided hearts, they may increase in universal love by continually turning to God and neighbor. (RegNB 22,27; EpFid I 1:5-10; EpFid II 48-53) [Rule TOR 8²]

At a recent "Expo" held in Paris, on Human Rights, ten challenges were presented to humanity. "Inclusion" was the common denominator. The principal factor underlying current global and local crises is exclusion. God is Love. This image of God is familiar to all religions and cultures. God's love is inclusive. Francis' love was inclusive: his whole life was a manifestation of an inclusive and harmonious relationship with God, with others, with creation. Clare's love too was inclusive: God, her sisters, her Franciscan brothers, the hierarchical church.

In history, we have several examples of "exclusion," due to an "either/or" approach. It is no exaggeration to say that all the wars of this century have been a subtle form of "exclusion," of "ethnic cleansing." During the 92 years of this century, over 116 million people have been killed by other people, because they were "not wanted," and needed to be "excluded." There have been several "Bosnias" in our world, and there continue to be "Bosnias," because "exclusion" in subtle forms continues to be on the agenda of many of our governments and political parties. The present world situation is calling out desperately for a New World Order of Inclusion, where the "both/and" approach will come into focus.

Many Franciscans are making clear options for an "inclusive" love. In the Americas (both North and South), we have the example of several communities who are reaching out to "excluded" groups, especially among the two most marginalized in history, in this particular continent, the native indigenous peoples and the African-Americans. Among the former, many have been exterminated. Today, they number 41,977,600 (that is, 6.33%), speaking 400 different languages.³

Among those who have opted to be inserted among the indigenous peoples, for some, it is a presence of Franciscan poverty, simplicity and minority. For others, in addition to this, they also work in collaboration with the indigenous peoples, for their basic human rights, especially the right to possess land, for this is vital to their religious and cultural life. We have the concrete example of Marie José and her community, in Laguna Yema, Argentina, who after a long and tedious struggle with the local authorities eventually succeeded in obtaining the above-mentioned right.

Paraguay: Thanks to the persevering courage of Maria, who in spite of many difficulties and obstacles continued to “reach out” to an indigenous group who resisted her visits initially, today, a community of five (Paraguayans, Chilean, Argentinean) is inserted in Tava’i. They share all that they are and all that they have with fourteen indigenous communities in the region. Their house is simple and welcoming, with a part which resembles the dwellings of the indigenous peoples, and which is reserved for them whenever they come to the “city” to buy provisions or such. The indigenous peoples have no more fear, for they now know that this group of religious respects their religion, culture and social customs, and hence do not feel threatened any more in their presence. Relationships have deepened, through a mutual experience of “inclusion,” and are now at a stage where they participate in each other’s “sacred” celebrations.

In Tava’i the celebration of the Eucharist is rare, but the daily contemplation and adoration of the Eucharistic Lord is source of their radical offering, becoming “bread broken, shared, given” to bring new life to their indigenous sisters and brothers.

In South Africa, a few years ago, when “exclusion” on the basis of race was still very much legalized (apartheid), a Franciscan community opted to be inserted in a purely “black” area, on the periphery. The community was mixed, and its very choice announced “inclusivity” at all levels. The sisters’ option to defy the unjust law was gospel-inspired. Their presence re-imagined God and the Church to an excluded, marginalized and oppressed people.

In Australia, Frances and Miriam have opted to be among the Aboriginal communities. They travel to different settlements, camping among them, covering an average of 1,000 kms fortnightly. The Toyota Land Cruiser is their home. Their Franciscan presence can be summarized in the words of the Aboriginals themselves: “...clean, straight and have no favorites,” which in our vocabulary means “chaste, honest and loving - without exclusion.” The Aboriginals are the “excluded” of the Australian society. Frances and Miriam say they have “little power as church,” but they have succeeded in making the 1,200 Aboriginals, with whom they are in contact, become Church through their option and life-style with its in-built simplicity, poverty, penance, and desert experience.

Also in Australia - in Palm Island, Alice Springs, Mount Isa and Collie - there are other Franciscan communities among the Aboriginals, with a similar vision and goal.

Fundamentalism and Integrism are born out of a tendency to “exclude.” In every religion and culture, we have extremists. Sects too, manifest such tendencies. Often, we see them as a problem, a threat ... Some Franciscans seek to understand them in an attitude of minority. Others search for gospel solutions, in

respect, dialogue and providing opportunities for mutual appreciation. In Shibin, Egypt, Ancilla and her community have taken up the challenge, in a climate of growing fundamentalism, “to provide a milieu in which Moslem and Christian girls can grow together, and come to a deeper understanding of each other.” Projects for the promotion of women (both Moslem and Christian), organized by Franciscan and other communities, are not uncommon in such regions.

For Reflection and Discussion

In all of us, there are tendencies to exclude, consciously or unconsciously. God's image is all-inclusive. Jesus' love is universal. Francis reached out to all peoples. Clare lived the dimension of inclusion in all her contacts. In our respective contacts, which categories of people are most excluded? Consciously? Unconsciously? Globally, which groups are the most excluded? How has our Franciscan presence and options made a difference? Where it has not made a difference, what are the difficulties/ obstacles/ reasons? How can these be overcome?

Poverty and Poor of the 90s



All the sisters and brothers zealously follow the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though rich beyond measure (2 Cor 8:9), he emptied himself for our sake (Phil 2:7), and with the holy Virgin his mother, Mary, he chose poverty in this world. Let them be mindful that they should have only those goods of this world, which, as the apostle says: “provide enough food and sufficient clothing; with these we are content” (1 Tim 6:8). Let them particularly beware of money. Let them be happy to live among the outcasts and despised, among the poor, the weak, the sick, the unwanted, the oppressed and the destitute. (RegNB VIII:11; RegNB IX:1-2; RegB V:3-4; EpFid II 5) [Rule TOR 21]

“If you want Peace, reach out to the Poor” was the Pope’s invitation to all of humanity on the first day of this year.⁴ The growing poverty in our world is a threat to Peace. Poverty is erupting into violence. The 1992 Report of the World Bank declared that two billion people live in poverty. This number continues to increase. “Banks kill 1,000 children a day” is the headline of an article that goes on to say that the International World Debt has emerged as the main cause of poverty and misery in the world.⁵ The present International Debt scandal is a subtle form of a world war: all countries are implicated. Its consequences are many: increasing poverty, violence at all levels, local wars, hunger, illness, growing illiteracy, unemployment — in brief, destruction of people and environment. Women and children are the worst affected. Sex Tourism has become “legalized.”

Structural Adjustment Programs are affecting mainly health and education.⁶ The banks responsible for this debt have received £83 billion from debtor nations. UNICEF has described the drain of £6,500 million a year in debt service out of Africa, as "one of the greatest international failings of this century." There are several "Somalias" in our world. The poorest countries have 60% more debt than a decade ago. The Philippines debt payment is £4 million a day! 70% of Filipinos live in absolute poverty.⁷ In the Philippines, Franciscan communities are responding to this challenge in different ways: memoranda, demonstrations, organized action with the people, alternate models of development and life-styles. Their situation of poverty is even further aggravated by repeated natural calamities, including the Mt. Pinatubo devastation. **Carmen, Thea, Veronica and Leonila**, have been re-located with 300 other families, in simple dwellings, in Palauig, all victims of the Mt. Pinatuba volcano eruption. Their presence reflects Franciscan simplicity, minority and solidarity; they have taken seriously the invitation of John Paul II to "fight hunger by changing life-style."⁸

In Amsterdam, Holland, a community of five have their house (resembling any other in one of its "hot-spots"), mingling freely with prostitutes, drug-addicts and AIDS patients. "Sex-shops" where women are "exposed" as commodities behind glass windows, a bridge where drug dealers traffic freely, St. Vincent's Home where the homeless and people with AIDS are equally welcome, are all in the immediate neighborhood of the community. Together with their Franciscan brothers, this community considers the zone as a "new reality of the presence of God, for he is present in the realities of humanity." They say there is nothing much they can do.... They welcome all those who come, take time to listen... do not judge them.... At the "Welcome Center," Gaby shares "time and friendship," distributes clean syringes and needles...; at "Myriamhuis" each night, they receive about 60 women who come there to rest, take a shower and sip coffee with them.... **Marie José, Christine, Johanna, Rosa and Gaby** find the time to meet each day as a community, to contemplate the Eucharist, drawing their missionary strength from the One who is the greatest missionary. Their life is impregnated with all that it means to be "contemplatives in action."

The phenomenon of the increasing number of the "Fourth World" in and around every big city is not being ignored by Franciscan women. Challenged by this reality, communities are moving away from the "Center," to be inserted in the "Inner cities." In Brixton, England, we hear of **Gisele, Margaret and Dymna**, whose dwelling is an "open house" for their neighbors who come there for recognition of their human dignity. The fact that it is now a formation house provides opportunities for the youth to give a radical gospel response in authenticity, as Franciscans.

Homeless women, who are stereotyped as "bag ladies" are among the many challenges to our society. Their numbers are increasing, and so too our desire to "share home and bread" with them. Poverty suddenly had a face for **Nancy and her community**, who had been on a "quest for a more radical experience of Franciscan simplicity and sharing, when one day they found a woman outside their gate picking through their garbage for something to eat. This led to the founding of the "The Dwelling Place," in the U.S.A., a temporary shelter for homeless women, estimated at 3,000 on the streets of New York alone. Services include physical and mental health care to these women who would otherwise not have this care. St. Francis moved away from the "center" to the "periphery," to care for the lepers, the rejected of his society. So too, these Franciscan women.

The Elderly, in many cultures, are among the needy. In Canada, we hear of **Suzanne, Lea and Collette**, among others, who reach out to them in their homes, or in "Foyers," revealing to them the image of God who is "Love and Mercy." Their role as "Eucharistic Ministers" is being lived in an attitude of Franciscan offering and sharing. In many industrialized countries, there are several examples of Franciscan communities who have made a similar option on behalf of this new group of emerging poor, an evidently marginalized group in our societies. In Spain, the Franciscans of the "third age" are receiving "new Life" as they organize themselves to reach out to people of their own age. The steadily growing number of soup kitchens and shelters as "responses," in these countries, are indicative of this new form of poverty.

The poor are becoming poorer because the rich are becoming richer, both at the national and international levels. Tommaso Larranaga links the present critical situation to "unjust trade relations, multinational companies, arms sales...." He also says that it is due to the consumeristic tendencies of the rich. He asks the question: "Are we aware of the tremendous injustices of the present World Order?"⁹ We are desperately in need of a New World Economic Order. Franciscans seek to respond to this challenge by collaborating with other groups who have a similar vision. It is in view of changing current economic policies and structures that certain Franciscan congregations cooperate with the "Africa Justice and Faith Network" both in Europe and the U.S.A.

The creation of an "International Franciscan Network" for the promotion of Human Rights (1992), with its headquarters in Cochabamba, Bolivia, is an additional effort on the part of Franciscan women and men in Latin America, to work for changes at all levels. In fact, in most countries in this continent, Franciscan women work in close collaboration with their Franciscan brothers, in the spirit of Francis and Clare. There is a continual search to give a relevant response as Franciscans. At a recent meeting held in Bolivia, the women in their quest for a new methodology for a New Evangelization, had this to say in their concluding statement: "As Franciscan women we wish to continue along the path of an au-

thentic conversion, without pointing an accusing finger at others, but seeking only to reveal the merciful face of God to all of creation...."¹⁰

For Reflection and Discussion

There is an escalation of violence in our world. Increase of poverty increases violence. In developing countries, the external debt is suffocating still further the poor. In industrialized countries, the high degree of consumerism and the unjust elements existing in the present free market system, are widening the gap between the rich and the poor. As Franciscans, how do we let ourselves be transformed by the above and other realities? Concretely, up to now, what changes have taken place in our options and life-styles? Has the Why, What, and How of Mission changed for us? What do the words New Evangelization mean for us?

Choosing Between Non-existence and Non-violence



As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts. No one should be roused to wrath or insult on their account, rather all should be moved to peace, goodwill and mercy because of their gentleness. The sisters and brothers are called to heal the wounded, to bind up those who are bruised and to reclaim the erring.... [Rule TOR 30]

One of the greatest challenges to the contemporary Franciscan woman is in the area of Peace. Peace comes through Justice. Justice is lived in Non-violence.

Violence is everywhere: outside of us and deep within us; institutional, structural, international, interpersonal; on the streets and inside our houses; in our way of thinking, speaking, acting and reacting; psychological, physical, and social. Sexism, Racism, War, Militarism, are but some manifestations of violence.

Franciscan women on every continent are responding to this challenge. In Las Vegas, U.S.A., a group of Franciscan women and men, together with others who have a similar vision and conviction, form the Pace e Bene Animating Group. They seek "to transform the violences and injustices of the North American culture through Non-violence, which they see as a way of life." Their approach is nurtured by:

- Contemplative prayer developed by meditation on Scripture, immersion in creation, and discernment of God acting in history;
- Reflection shaped by scholarly analysis and activists' struggles, and helping to incarnate the Gospel of Justice and Truth in society;
- Retreats and workshops on non-violence spirituality and methodology;

- Non-violent action, including resistance to nuclear weapons, military intervention, homelessness, racism, sexism, domestic violence, and other destructive conditions that prevent the emergence of a more just and peaceful world;
- The Transformations Groups Project designed to deepen and strengthen groups working for social change in the U.S.A.;
- Publications: a newsletter, *The Wolf of Pace e Bene*, and essays on non-violence, including a study on non-violent action at the Nevada Test Site.

In March this year, the group completed twelve years of resistance, rising out of a conviction, ... "that economic motives, not world security, motivates arms production.... If weapons testing stops, at least the development of new weapons will be greatly impeded."¹¹ Theirs is a prophetic resistance, in a Franciscan spirit, to the violence being done to people and to creation. Their liturgical Eucharistic celebrations have taken on a deeper meaning, because they live the Eucharist throughout the day, being "bread broken and given" for a non-violent world.

"No war is just"; "no more can we make a difference between a just war and unjust war."¹² War is the worst form of terrorism. It is a violation of all rights: human, cultural, environmental, economic, political. Having seen/lived the evils and consequences of war, increasing numbers are now advocating an active non-violence. Before, during and after the Gulf War, several Franciscan groups protested, together with other Peace Movements. The war in ex-Yugoslavia continues to elicit a varied response. Recently, in collaboration with the movement "Builders of Peace," Carmela, Carla and Grazia, from Italy, went on a Peace March to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Dorica from Ljubljana, Slovenia, was part of an Ecumenical delegation, who crossed the capital cities of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia to place in the hands of the religious leaders, an appeal for peace: "The war in ex-Yugoslavia shows once more that it is not by means of arms that conflicts are settled. A modern war has neither conqueror nor conquered. It leads to hatred and a spiral of violence. That is why we call on all believers, and all people of good will to have confidence in the power of non-violent methods to resolve conflicts...."

In the Middle East, in a context of war and violence, Franciscans are responding by making conscious efforts to be instruments of peace and reconciliation. In Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, they take the initiative to be bridges among the different religions, nationalities, ethnic groups, religious rites and other warring factions. Mixed communities where Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians live together witness to the Franciscan values of reconciliation, equality and sisterhood. Therese from Saida, Lebanon, says: "in a context of war in which one group was crushed by another, we were able to live in solidarity with both groups because of our option for reconciliation, in the name of Christ, in the footsteps of St. Francis...."

If our fraternity had not been deeply united, if we had not experienced mutual support, we could not have lasted in such a context....”

In Angola, Liberia, Mozambique, Sri Lanka, Zaire, the option of Franciscan communities to remain with the people at frontier posts, at times of war, witness to their courageous Franciscan missionary dynamism. A young Mozambican religious, when given the option to leave a war zone, replied: “...from the moment I entered, I have heard examples of what it means to be Eucharistic, Missionary, Franciscan.... This is my moment to live these dimensions.... I opt to remain here.” The previous night, this community of four had been crippled with fear, because of cross-fighting in their immediate neighborhood. Having spent this time before the Blessed Sacrament, they were renewed in strength. It was also an experiential moment of utter poverty because all their provisions, clothes and possessions had been stolen that same night.

Non-violence as a way of life takes on a special significance in contexts where governments opt for new forms of Socialism. The Franciscans in Burma and Vietnam, through a continual process of reflection and interiorization have given a new face to the Franciscan values of poverty, simplicity and minority, in their respective contexts. In Vietnam, the women have the additional advantage of having their Franciscan brothers to help them in their faith journey. In Burma, we hear of the missionary courage of Chantal, Justina, and Elizabeth who are involved in a healing ministry, among the wounded of different factions. All are equally welcome to their clinic. Katherine, a young religious, says she is growing in her religious and Franciscan vocation, in and through the lived reality.

For Reflection and Discussion

St. Francis' life, his options, his value-system, continue to attract the youth of today. Authenticity and coherence, when lived by Franciscans, are essential elements for the youth, in their choices.

- How are Franciscan women responding to the aspirations/expectations/“calls” of the youth:
 - to commit themselves in volunteer services, within the countries or overseas?
 - in their discernment process to respond to a Franciscan vocation?
 - in their desire for a formation program in and through today's realities?
- What are the difficulties/obstacles we face with regard to the first question?
- Share any new insights/convictions you have with regard to the first question.

Women Awake ...



Let the brothers and the sisters keep in mind how great a dignity the Lord God has given them, because he created them and formed them in the image of his beloved Son according to the flesh and in his own likeness according to the Spirit. (Col 1:16; Adm V:1) [Rule TOR 14]

“Woman is created in the image of God.” No one denies this statement. “Sexism is as serious a moral and social issue as racism, classism, militarism.” Many deny this statement. Concretely, how do we interpret, both in the church and in society, “Woman is created in the image of God”? In the correspondence course on Franciscan Missionary Charism, there is a chapter on “Addressing Sexism: A Franciscan Challenge.” Here sexism is defined as:

the prejudice or discrimination based on gender... It is regarded as one of the most pervasive and dehumanizing forms of structural oppression in our world. Frequently, it is heightened by historical-cultural attitudes, socio-economic conditions, and religious beliefs that serve to justify the subjugation and devaluation of women in relationship to men.¹³

Some facts and figures:

- two-thirds of the world's illiterates are women.
- 50-80% of production, processing and marketing are in the hands of women.
- women run 70% of small enterprises.
- women are the providers of health care, yet have minimal access to medical facilities.
- women in rural areas spend 2,000 to 5,000 hours a year just on the transport of water, of fuel and goods to and from market.
- one of every three households is totally dependent on a woman for its livelihood.¹⁴
- 35,000 girls and women have been raped in Bosnia (between the ages of 7 and 80), during a period of nine months.¹⁵ Every country at war has similar figures.

When we read such facts, when we listen to women sharing their own personal stories of oppression, exploitation, frustration, do we stop and ask ourselves WHY? I would strongly recommend to you the book, *Awake: Asian Women and the Struggle for Justice*¹⁶ which recounts the personal stories of about twenty women who are victims of a patriarchal system of exploitation (at home and at work), of sexual harassment/raping (at home and at work); women who do not have the basic human rights to food, house, family, health, education, name and recognition, land and country - in brief, to human dignity. We as religious, have all the above. Do we ask WHY they do not have the above rights?

As Franciscans, we share a common commitment to respond as God did, to every person that cries out to us for justice and compassion (Ex 2:23-25; 3:7-12). Franciscan women are becoming increasingly aware of the plight of the vast majority of the 51% of the world's population, and are seeking to respond, by revealing to them the image of God: Woman and Compassion.

In India, in a context where the degrading situation of women, due to religious and cultural factors, is increasing cause for concern, Franciscan communities have mobilized women helping them to grow in awareness of their own situation, and to act as catalysts of change. Celine says: "our priority is to work for the promotion of women... being aware of, and involved in the issues affecting them today...." They do this according to each one's gifts and capacities. Stella, who works in collaboration with CARITAS, has as her goal: "Empower Women, Transform Society." She organizes women's groups, networks, and has initiated training leadership among them. Anne, a lawyer, works with "Saheli" (a Hindi word meaning "companion"), dealing with women's situations: rape, alcoholism, wife-beating, dowry, harassment, murder, violence in the family and problems of working women. Leelamma, as a member of the Islamic Study Association of India, builds awareness among Moslem women concerning their rights and dignity. Edith has initiated functional literacy classes in one of the slums of Delhi. Her imaginative and creative methods, use of traditional dramas, puppet shows, songs and street plays, her use of visuals and posters, have helped to bring home to women, in a non-violent way, the message of liberation.

Gandhi, himself a staunch Hindu, often is being quoted on this issue:

Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal, to me, as is the abuse of the better half of humanity, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two.... The remedy is in her hands rather than in man's.... If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women....¹⁷

In Asian countries, where Buddhism is the pre-dominant religion, Franciscan women quote Lord Buddha, in an effort to correct erroneous interpretations of Buddhist religious culture, on the image of women. He strongly emphasized the equality of man and woman, and their equal status in society.¹⁸ In the Islamic religion, although Muhammad, the "holy prophet" advocated equal rights for both male and female, in practice, the patriarchal society uses religion as a tool for exploitation of women.¹⁹ Franciscan women, working in predominantly Islamic countries, with much discretion, are encouraging Moslem women to become more aware of their rights and duties.

In Coroico, Bolivia, a vivid memory for Angelica is "the picture of a woman, in her late thirties, a baby on her back, who went to the blackboard with a piece of

chalk and slowly wrote the letters of her name. From the energy used, perspiration fell from her face in huge drops; also because of the awesomeness of such an accomplishment! Never before in her life had she taken a pencil in her hand, nor dared to be different...." The above is the fruit of workshops: "Enabling Women."

In But Village, Papua New Guinea, we hear of the courage of Terry. Re-reading the Scriptures, especially on the powerlessness of women in the Old and New Testaments, brought out in her the giftedness of daring and audacity. She takes concrete action, vis a vis a village leader who treats his people unjustly and violently. Contemplation led her to action, for she says, Jesus inspired her to speak out in the face of evil: "...for evil grows when it is not talked about and brought out into the open, where the light of Christ and his truth can shine.... I shared my reflections with my community who gave me confidence to do something about it." Terry's actions could have serious consequences for her family still living under the leader's rule....

For Reflection and Discussion

For over 3000 years, men have played the dominant role in the imaging of God, through the writings of the Scriptures, and through preaching. For nearly 2000 years, men have continued to play the dominant role in the imaging of the Church. The images from which we operate today need to be changed/completed, if we are committed to a New Evangelization. What are some of the present key images? What images need to become more evident in the process of a New Evangelization? How would you see women re-imaging God and the Church, in co-responsibility?

Without Land, Home, Future ...



Let them be happy to live among the outcasts and despised, among the poor, the weak, the sick, the unwanted, the oppressed and the destitute. (RegNB IX:2) [Rule TOR 21]

Eighteen million refugees, of whom the majority are women, children and elderly, cry out for mercy. They have not become refugees through their own choice. Political, economic, religious conditions have forced on them what they would not otherwise freely choose - to leave their country, land, home, family, loved ones. Many categories of immigrants are in a similar situation. It is hard to understand the depth of their sufferings, their experiences of rejection and exclusion, both in their home countries, and in the countries where they seek asylum.

In all countries, where there are refugees and displaced people due to civil and international wars, Franciscan communities have opened their doors to welcome them, giving them hospitality, or protecting those who flee from death and vio-

lence. Some work in refugee camps, rendering medical and other services: in Ivory Coast, Liberia, Zaire, in India, Sri Lanka, in French Guiana, Surinam. In the United States, Canada, and in many countries in Europe, individuals and communities are working for the rights of those who seek asylum. In France, we hear of Antoinette, who in collaboration with the parish, has succeeded in obtaining legal refugee status for several who have fled their countries for political motives. In order to help them in their faith journey, the parish assures the presence of chaplains who represent different cultures and languages.

In North Providence, Rhode Island, a Franciscan community has divided a part of their property into thirty vegetable plots and shared these among thirty Hmong refugee families. Franciscan values of sharing and detachment take on a new face in present realities.

For Reflection and Discussion

"Forms of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be overcome and eradicated as incompatible with God's design." (GS 29)

The above statement of the Second Vatican Council is clear on the essential equality of all people, this being a vital element of social justice. In all our societies today, there exist in some form, racism, sexism and various forms of discrimination. Maybe, there are such victims among us. As Franciscans, what is our prophetic response there where we are inserted? How can our presence/options/ attitudes, make a difference?

Conversion Through Encounters

The Lord himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body. [Test 2,3]

"The Lord himself led me among them" said Francis of his meeting with the lepers, a meeting which turned his world upside down." Anne feels she understands how this can happen. Let us listen to her experience:

Five years ago, a friend and co-worker at St. Joseph's Hospital contracted HIV. At a loss for a way to deal with his illness, he asked Anne's help. She continued to minister to him throughout the last weeks of his life. His belief in a merciful God, his faith in reconciliation, and the love with which he accepted death, are etched in Anne's memory. The conviction that she wanted to work in AIDS ministry was born on his last breath. The support group which she founded grew into a family and then a community comprised of men, women and children. One young man asked Anne to help him compose a liturgy for his own funeral. Another asked her to come to his home to offer Eucharist for him. "You know I can't do that" she replied. "But we can have a special agape service," he said... "Jesus will be where he wants to be."

Encounter with the leper was the turning point in Francis' life. Today, encounter with AIDS patients or their families, is the turning point in the lives of many Franciscan women. Some reach out to them, while others keep away through fear, prejudice and ignorance. While there are still lepers in certain countries, people with AIDS are on the increase in several countries. By the year 2000, a cumulative total of 15-20 million adults plus 10 million infants and children will be infected with HIV. Already cases have been reported from 150 countries. They urgently need to experience the tenderness of God. For Franciscan women it is an opportunity to re-image God and the church. It is a call to give a new meaning to the Eucharist, as developed by Julian Filochowski:

For most of us, the starting point and reference point for all our work is the Eucharist. As we share the body and blood of Christ as our food and drink in the Eucharist, may we also affirm that it is the real body of Christ, who suffers today through HIV and AIDS. It is the real mind of Christ which is racked by fear and confusion. It is the real image of God in Christ which is blasphemed through prejudice and oppression.²⁰

Institutions, as Agents of Change

In Institutions, run by Franciscan women, in the fields of Administration, Education, Health, and other Professions, the process to integrate Franciscan values is moving forward slowly. Charisms are being shared and lived with lay people. In some instances, there have been initial resistance on the part of lay people (as there has been on the part of sisters), especially when it entailed change of options, patterns and life-styles. However, the number of committed people who are now collaborating in promoting Franciscan values is increasing.

We have the concrete example of a Franciscan community, who in their Operational Philosophy for their Health-Care system, have included the Franciscan values of Peace-Keeping, Non-violence, and Just Relationships. In their business endeavors, their goal is to assure that "Justice takes precedence over profit." Their way of re-imagining the gospel of sharing is inspired by their foundress' slogan: "As long as God does not stop giving to us, we shall not stop giving to the poor."

For Reflection and Discussion

Recent Pontifical Documents and other pastoral letters speak often of the "Church of the Poor," "the Poor Church," etc. A Franciscan sister has this to say: "In general, we religious are better off in many ways.... We have educational opportunities, dress well, have enough to eat.... We travel comfortably.... We have many opportunities that the others, especially the poor do not have.... In such an atmosphere, it is easy to kill within us, as individuals and congregations, the spirit of sharing/detachment/sacrifice... Instead the desire to accumulate increases."

We religious are the church: what images of the church do we reflect? For Francis, solidarity had a double dimension: interior and exterior. For us Franciscans today, what does it mean "to be in solidarity with the poor"?

Contemplation Leads to Action



From the depths of their inner life, let them love, honor, adore, serve, bless and glorify our most high and eternal God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.... The sisters and brothers whom the Lord has called to the life of contemplation, with a daily renewed joy, should manifest their special dedication to God, and celebrate the Father's love for the world. (*RegNB XXIII:11*) [*Rule TOR 9*]

Technology has contributed immensely to the advancement of humanity; it has also contributed to the destruction of humanity and creation. Technology has reduced manual labor; it has also made us too busy. Today, we do not allow ourselves to be nurtured by silence and solitude. We find it difficult to be present to the Presence within. Franciscans are becoming increasingly aware of this reality. Responses to this challenge vary according to contexts and situations. Houses of prayer, retreat houses, "desert" days and sessions, are all in view of deepening the Franciscan contemplative dimension. In India for example, prolonged moments of solitude and silence in "Ashram" styled retreat houses are not uncommon. In the West and in the East, Franciscans are letting themselves be enriched by other spiritualities, linking St. Francis' journey of faith with other faith journeys. Francine says that such an experience helped to deepen my knowledge and love of St. Francis of Assisi; I grew in my appreciation of my own Franciscan spirituality.

While Patricia says her contemplative prayer has deepened progressively since two years through regular meditation and "centering prayer," Irene, in the light of her experiences with other religions, sends an appeal in the following words: "I personally feel the need for a renewed call to all Franciscan men and women, especially to the women in the Third Order Regular, to review the place of contemplation in our religious communities.... I would be happy if St. Clare's centenary could provide a starting point for our life of contemplation, for our witness is being weakened...."

Planetary Option, Local Actions



The brothers and sisters are to praise the Lord, the King of heaven and earth, with all his creatures, and to give him thanks, because by his own holy will, and with his only Son with the Holy Spirit, he has created all things spiritual and material, and made us in his own image and likeness. (*RegNB XXIII:1; CantSol 3*) [*Rule TOR 10*]

"Eco-1992" was given wide coverage in the mass-media in all countries. Never before was there such global concern, interest, and waiting in hope. A year has passed. The responses are varied. For some Franciscans it was an invitation to make concrete changes in life-styles. For others it was just an event among others. We as Franciscans cannot be indifferent to our threatened planet, which is being destroyed progressively. Africa has lost 50% of its forests; Asia 42%; Latin America 37%. The world is losing its trees at the rate of 7% a year. Rich and poor countries consume the world's trees. Trees bind the earth with their roots, protecting the soil from erosion, and reducing water evaporation. Deforestation is a main factor in the increase of both droughts and floods.²¹ We see disappearing from the earth several varieties of food, medicinal plants, fish, birds, animals, all due to pollution of land, air, water, and ecological disasters.

Woman, image of God, is giver of life. The present ecological crisis is an invitation to women, to nurture life that is being destroyed. To Franciscan women, it is a call within a call, to give life and to protect life. Many are responding to this call. The Franciscans at the U.N. made an appeal to plant trees: in 1990 alone 20,844 were planted in 33 countries. In Garba Tulla Kenya, Chamberino U.S.A., Piura Peru, Franciscan women have literally made the "desert bloom" through their efforts to relate with nature. In Australia, Franciscans were initiators and animators for the "clean up Australia" project in their respective districts. Such examples can be multiplied.

Franciscan tradition is rich in eco-spirituality. St. Francis' "Canticle of Creatures" is the clearest expression of universal brotherhood/sisterhood; he incorporates into it both the human and the cosmic world. It reflects his whole personality, as one who is constantly in the presence of the Divine, the human, and nature. These three realities form one whole in his way of thinking and acting. Relating with one leads to relating with the other. It is the fruit of his contemplation of the Triune God.

The World Council of Churches, at its meetings in Switzerland (1989), Korea (1990), Australia (1991), in a true spirit of Ecumenism, searched for responses to today's challenges. On each occasion, the messages were powerful on the theme of "Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation." Today, efforts are being made to go beyond the Christian world and to collaborate actively with other faiths. A New World Order can be achieved only by international cooperation and solidarity. Interdependence among nations includes a "giving and receiving" of cultural and religious values. There is much we can receive from the eco-spiritualities of the African traditional religions and the Indigenous religions. Isolated efforts are being made to collaborate with other christian denominations and other faiths. In the context of the present ecological crisis, our role as "nurturers" invites us to take

the initiative, with Franciscan prophetism and daring, for planetary options and local actions, with all groups. Because of our Franciscan heritage, there is much we can "give," and in an attitude of Franciscan minority, there is much we can "receive" from others.

For Reflection and Discussion

"We are God's fellow-workers" (1 Cor 3:9); "I consider you a co-worker of God himself" (St. Clare's Third Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague). If we are co-workers with God, what is our mission as Franciscan women in the face of the present ecological crisis:

- as individuals?
- as prophetic communities?
- as congregations?
- in collaboration with our Franciscan brothers and secular Franciscans?
- in collaboration with non-governmental organizations and other groups?

The Franciscans have a non-governmental organization status at the U.N. Together with the other non-governmental organizations there, they have an impact on the 180 governments that form the U.N. In the light of the present situation in our world and in the light of your lived experience here, what would be your message to the Franciscans at the U.N.? (The present vision statement of the Franciscans at the U.N. includes care of creation, peacemaking, concern for the poor.)

Conclusion

Woman, an image of God: we see emerging in the contemporary Franciscan woman the images of God as revealed in a re-reading of the Scriptures.

In the African woman and in the woman of the Pacific, rooted in their cultures and enriched by the Franciscan charism, we see the relational image of God: relationship with "God - divine - sacred," with the other, with "Mother Earth." In the Latin American woman, inserted in her context, and gifted with the Franciscan vocation, we see the liberational image of God -the God who liberates from personal and social sin. In the Asian woman whose identity is necessarily impregnated with the religious and cultural values of her environment, the Franciscan value of non-violence is reflected in her image of God. The "Western" woman (Australia, Europe, North America), who lets herself be constantly challenged by the values and non-values of her context in response to her Franciscan call, mirrors the compassionate image of God. The world today needs to see this cumulative image of God as reflected in the Franciscan woman.

Francis' biographers link his conversion to three events: the message received through the gospel at the Portiuncula, the encounter with the leper, and the mission he received from the crucifix at St. Damian's. Three calls in one: to live a simple and poor life-style, to reach out to the poorest and most marginalized in society, to "re-build" the church, with a view to building the Reign of God, which is Justice, Peace and Joy (Rm 14:17). In the lives of the contemporary Franciscan women,

we see emerging the above image of the religious life; today too, Jesus "sends" us, speaking to us from the crucifix, through the voices of the crucified, on every continent, "Go, rebuild the church... Go, protect life... Go, save the planet..."

Like St. Francis let us also say humbly: "Until now, we have done nothing. Let us begin today." Let us continue our journey with Mary, the perfect image of God, and in the company of our Franciscan brothers and Secular Franciscans.

Endnotes

- ¹ Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap., and Ignatius Brady, OFM, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, New York: Paulist Press, 1982.
- ² *The Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis*, Pittsburgh: Franciscan Federation, 1983.
- ³ Statistics compiled by A. V. Gleich (1989), F. Chiodo (1991), *Movimento Franciscano*, Bolivia, January 1992, 101.
- ⁴ John Paul II, *Peace Day Message*, January, 1993.
- ⁵ *WORD*, Ireland, October 1992, 30.
- ⁶ Changes that a developing country must make to its economy in order to qualify for further IM loans or extensions on repayments. These changes consist of an "austerity package" of cuts in public expenditures (welfare, health, education), reduced imports, and increasing emphasis on export products (for example, cash crops), mostly to industrialized countries.
- ⁷ *WORD*, Ireland, October 1992, 30.
- ⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 59.
- ⁹ Tommaso Larranaga, OFM, *Per i sentieri della verità al perdono*, Assisi 1991, 6.
- ¹⁰ *Las franciscanas en su labor evangelizadora*, Bolivia 1992, 5.
- ¹¹ Statement of the Franciscan members, Las Vegas, 1 January, 1991.
- ¹² Gino Concetti, *La guerra e le sue tragedie*, Rome: Edizioni Studium 1992, 158-168. Concetti takes a clear stand on the evils of war. We inherited the expression, "a just war," from St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. This was uncontested until the end of the last century when it was first taken up by Leo XIII. Since then, this concept has been much debated. On the occasion of the Gulf War, and since then, John Paul II has clearly condemned all wars as being morally unacceptable.
- ¹³ *Build With Living Stones: A Program of Study on the Franciscan Missionary Charism*, Pittsburgh: Franciscan Federation of the Brothers and Sisters of the U.S., 1987, Lesson Unit 24:24/1.
- ¹⁴ *Franciscans at the U.N.* Newsletter, July 1991. Quoted from a UNIFEM Report (A funding organization for women's issues and projects).
- ¹⁵ Message of Muslim representative from Bosnia, Day of Prayer, Assisi, 9 January 1993.
- ¹⁶ *Awake: Asian Women and the Struggle for Justice*, Australia: Asian Partnership for Human Development, 1985.
- ¹⁷ Mohan Rao (ed.), *The Message of Mahatma Gandhi*, (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India) 1981, 63.
- ¹⁸ *Awake: Asian Women and the Struggle for Justice*, 64.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.
- ²⁰ Julian Filochowski, *A Measure of Our Humanity: The Church's Response to the AIDS Pandemic*, Opening Speech at the CARITAS consultation on AIDS, Hong Kong, 7 January, 1991.
- ²¹ "Third World Forests," in *WORD*, September 1992.

“With Swift Pace and Light Step”

ANNE MUNLEY, IHM

Introduction

Across the last few years I have had wonderful opportunities to reflect on the NOW and the FUTURE of religious life with persons, lay and religious, from various parts of the country and from different parts of the world who care deeply about religious life and its future direction.

These experiences have filled me with hope. Typically I am asked to present data descriptive of religious life and of pressing societal needs. This often involves looking at difficult and somewhat sobering realities. In working with such groups, I have come to realize that despite acute awareness of a corporate poverty of diminishing numbers, increasing median ages, fewer young or new members, and expanding demands on shrinking human and fiscal resources, U.S. religious are persistent in their desire to respond to urgent needs in a world and a society characterized by rapid rates of change. In a time of flux and downsizing, there is substantial evidence that suggests a conscious refusal of religious institutes to turn inward. A stance such as this springs from hope.

The more immersed I have become in recent research on religious life, and most especially in the LCWR studies, the more attuned I have become to the sense of hope that pervades much of the data. The lens of rational analysis is not strong enough to see hope. It takes the eyes of the heart to recognize mystery.

In considering the Franciscan Response to the LCWR Ministry Survey we will do well to keep before us a definition of hope by the Brazilian writer, Ruben Alves, that has poignant relevance to religious life at this moment in history:

What is hope? It is the presentiment that imagination is more real and reality less real than it looks. It is the hunch that the overwhelming brutality of facts that oppress and repress is not the last word. It is the suspicion that Reality is much more complex than realism wants us to believe; that the frontiers of the

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possible are not determined by the limits of the actual, and that in a miraculous and unexpected way life is preparing the creative event which will open the way to freedom and resurrection. (Ruben Alves, *Tomorrow's Child*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972, 194).

Having acknowledged the deeper realities that move hearts and shape events, let us consider briefly some starting points that provide a contextual framework for discussing the data.

Visioning to the Future versus Visioning for the Future

The first starting point is concerned with the difference between visioning to the future and visioning for the future.

Visioning to the future involves conscious commitment to converting ideology to value-based action. The present and the future are not discrete, discontinuous realities. Visioning to the future heightens awareness that the NOW and the FUTURE of religious life are linked in a process of becoming. We are already living into the future. In many ways, the future of religious life, like the reign of God, is both here and not yet. As we review the Franciscan data, I think you will see many ways in which the future is both here and not yet.

Religious Life as a Social Movement

Secondly, as a sociologist, I find it helpful to describe religious life as a social movement. In a broad historical sense, religious life is a dynamic, value-oriented movement in the Church and society arising from a Gospel vision of “what ought to be” that is articulated and lived according to diverse charisms in concrete circumstances of time, history and culture. As a social movement, religious life has been both shaped by and is a shaper of social and ecclesial realities.

This past year or so I have been reflecting on the paradigm shifts in society and in religious life and on the implications of the LCWR data; my imagination has been captivated by the image of a Spirit-woven tapestry. In a poetic sense, religious life is a dynamic tapestry made up of various segments woven in response to specific needs and challenges of different historical times. The huge tapestry of religious life is still in process. Much of its beauty is due to the diversity of charisms that weave changing patterns of life and ministry into the total fabric of religious life.

Individual religious congregations and federations such as the Franciscan Federation are social movement organizations with formal structures designed to facilitate implementation of group-shared values and goals. They are social structures for converting ideology to action. Like social movements, social movement organizations are by their very nature dynamic rather than static. In the imagery of weaving, there have been and will be ongoing changes in the patterns, textures and colors of Franciscan threads in the tapestry.

The Function of Religious Life: Prophetic Liminality

A third starting point is that throughout history, religious life in various cultures has had a distinct purpose or function: the embodiment of liminal identity. To be liminal is to be situated at the threshold, the place or point of entering or beginning. Every society creates liminal groups to embody core values and to reflect back to society at any given time those tensions that exist between "what is" and the ideals and vision of "the ought to be." Liminal groups and organizations help society to clarify values and to change social structures. They can be initiators and effective agents of value-oriented change. Liminal groups are both at the edge of and at the heart of society.

In this respect liminal groups are prophetic. They are called to the tasks of the prophet that Walter Brueggemann named so clearly in his book, *The Prophetic Imagination*, especially the task of reading the signs of the times, critiquing sinful distortions in society while, at the same time, not draining people of their energy. Liminal groups are called to foster hope, to inspire a passion for possibility, to speak to the profound spiritual questions of the day and to facilitate movement toward an alternate vision.

Prophetic liminality is central to religious life and to religious congregations as social movement organizations. Prophetic liminality demands focus and flexibility, willingness to pursue the vision without total clarity, ongoing personal conversion and organizational transformation. In Franciscan terms, prophetic liminality involves the life-long process of metanoia, a turning to God and a turning to neighbor, an ongoing process of Gospel living, a process of becoming conformed to Christ. Prophetic groups and individuals are willing to confront gaps between "the is" and the vision of "the ought to be" in themselves as well as in society.

Religious Life and Paradigm Change

A final starting point is an assumption underlying various recent studies that religious life in the United States is in the midst of a major paradigm shift. A paradigm shift is far more than a process of adaptation; it is a process of substantive change. In the context of religious life, a paradigm shift is a process of substantive change that generates a new configuration of the stance and meaning of religious life within culture.

Serious efforts to articulate emerging understanding of the new paradigm are a significant contribution to religious life. There are obvious parallels among the LCWR/CMSM "Transformative Elements," The Religious Life Futures Project's "Components of a Future Vision," and the "Elements of the Vision" gleaned from Convergence gatherings. (See *Elements of the New Paradigm of Religious Life* at end of article)

Each of these listings projects sensitive awareness that a call to contemporary religious life is also a call to contemplative receptivity, prophetic liminality, inclusive community, global spirituality and cultural interdependence. Underneath all

of these elements is a call to INCLUSION, PARTICIPATION, and INCULTURATION.

It is important to remember that paradigm shifts arise out of the profound needs of the times. In many ways, the closing decades of this century are a *Kairos* moment, a moment for significant choices. Most present-day religious hold in their memories the dramatic changes of Vatican II and the years of participatory efforts to re-image religious life according to the vision of Vatican II. At the same time, we religious, like everyone else, are struggling to absorb the impact of the massive social changes of the last few years: the end of the cold war, changing geopolitical boundaries, a re-emergence of ethnic cleansing in various parts of the world, global economic and political shifts, changing demographic patterns, a worldwide economic crisis, and power and ideological shifts in the United States as signaled by the election of a U.S. president from the Baby Boomer generation.

Currently U.S. society is fragmented by a host of "social sins" in need of redemption: hunger, homelessness, violence, normlessness, disproportionate representation of women, children and minority groups among the poor, ecological irresponsibility, skewed access to educational and health care opportunities, and a growing body of throw-away people — children, the elderly, young black males, the unborn, persons with AIDS, refugees, undocumented aliens, the incarcerated, the dying. At the core of these problems are systemic racism, sexism, classism, ageism and militarism. These are times filled with prophetic possibilities for religious, for religious institutes and for works sponsored by religious institutes.

In these times, as Marie Augusta Neal, SND de Namur, is quick to point out, social analysis is necessary for discerning appropriate prophetic response to concrete circumstances in society that cry out for truth, justice, transformation and healing. Such tasks are central both to the mission of the Church and to the mission of religious institutes.

In *Threads for the Loom*, six challenges posed by the emerging religious life paradigm are developed.

First, the new paradigm is challenging religious, religious institutes, and works sponsored by religious institutes to model commitment to PROPHETIC INTERDEPENDENCE. Prophetic interdependence involves a reordering of priorities to take into consideration the common good. Today this demands a global world view that includes all peoples of the world as well as the planet itself.

Underneath this challenge is the fundamental human tension between self-centered individualism and repressive collectivism. It is part of the age-old struggle between love and selfishness. Such selfishness can be corporate as well as individual.

In an essay, "The Power of the Powerless," Vaclav Havel wrote about "living within a lie" and "living in the truth." These phrases are helpful for getting at the

issue of individual and common good. Rugged individualism and repressive collectivism are both forms of "living within a lie." Structural change happens when groups and individuals refuse to live within a lie and choose instead to live in the truth.

In these times "living in the truth" involves having a profound sense of collective responsibility. It springs from a belief that it is possible to shape a new reality. It involves having a world view that is based on relationship. What goes on in the micro world of everyday life must be considered in relationship to the macro world of much larger structures and the interests of people who are otherwise nameless and remote.

Prophetic interdependence is transformational. It demands appropriate balancing of the rights and needs of "the one" and "the many." When a right ordering of relationships in society is distorted, an existential revolution is required. Havel describes such a revolution as: "a radical renewal of the relationship of human beings to the human order. A new experience of being, a renewed rootedness in the universe, a newly grasped sense of higher responsibility, a new-found inner relationship to other people and to the human community." For Havel, the heart of the issue "is the rehabilitation for values like trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity and love." (Jan Vladislav (ed.), *Vaclav Havel or Living in the Truth*, 1987, 117).

Think again of the current examples of "social sin" that I mentioned earlier and imagine what our situation might be in 1993 if values like trust, openness, responsibility, solidarity and love guided economic and political decision making.

Living the truth of prophetic interdependence includes sensitizing one another to the devastating consequences of stagnant relationships based on dominance and subordination. Prophetic interdependence is rooted in a circular rather than a linear world view. It is characterized by modes of interaction that are cooperative, collegial and collaborative.

Commitment to prophetic interdependence is the leverage that can help religious institutes and works sponsored by religious institutes to address a major problem of our society, a problem on which Robert Bellah and his associates focus in their book, *The Good Society*: the loss of a capacity to cultivate a shared form of life oriented to human dignity and wholeness rather than to private acquisition and consumption. Religious institutes can exercise a key role in stimulating consciousness of the importance of such questions as: How do the decisions we make as individuals, as communities, as federations, as Church, as society affect the life chances of others, particularly the poor?

The second challenge that the new paradigm of religious life poses is OPENNESS TO CHANGE AND TO BEING CHANGED. It is important for us to realize that we are living in times characterized by an enormously rapid rate of change. Change is a constant of contemporary experience.

Change happens when experience leads us to see with "new eyes." We can

only see with new eyes when we are flexible enough to enter into the worlds of others and respond with thought as well as feeling. There is no substitute for direct experience of people and cultures which are in some ways unfamiliar. Experience is a fundamental aspect of the educational process. Experience impacts attitudes; attitudes impact behavior.

Openness to change and to being changed in these times includes willingness to become and to help others become listeners and learners in social or cultural contexts different from their own. Taking on the stance of a learner involves letting go of the notion that the way we see and do things is necessarily the best way. That's not easy to do especially when we've been "successful" with what we have done.

Some questions that the challenge of openness to change and to being changed raise are: How often in ministry situations do we expect other people to become like us? Whom do we allow to teach and evangelize us? How often do we place ourselves in or facilitate opportunities for others to experience situations where they can learn through the eyes, ears, head and heart of another. How can this transform us?

A third challenge of the new paradigm and perhaps the greatest challenge of all is than of INCULTURATION. Inculturation is a theological term used to describe the interconnectedness between faith and culture. Faith is situated in culture and culture is to be permeated by faith.

We are living at a prime moment for inculturation, for uncovering the Word of God, the seeds of faith, that are already present in different cultures. When we go into a ministry situation we are not bringing the Word; we are there to encounter the Word. Insertion of the Christian life into a culture or cultures requires prophetic liminality that reflects an authentic embodiment of Gospel values.

For a long time the United States has given uncritical acceptance to the myth of the "melting pot." There is no such thing as a "melting pot." In ministry and in community it is important to realize that the human spirit resists homogenization. This world and this country contain a mosaic of cultures, each blessed with goodness and beauty; each carrying within it elements of its own destruction. As theologian, Virgil Elizondo puts it: "Every culture is in need of redemption." The challenge of inculturation demands that we confront distortions that are present in every culture including our own. The mission of Jesus and the mission of the Church are situated in human history and culture. Christianity is not one big melting pot; it is meant, rather, to be expressed through a variety of cultures.

Inculturation is a complex process. All of the cultural overlays that have impacted each person across a life history must be drawn into interaction with the Gospel — ethnic, social and religious heritage, U.S. values and First World mass culture, the subcultures that we become part of when we entered religious life, the group or corporate cultures of the settings in which we live or minister. What inculturation means in everyday language is that the total social, economic, politi-

cal and cultural reality of a people is the context within which and upon which the life and teachings of Jesus must be brought to bear. This is what the pastoral letters of the U.S. Bishops on the economy and on peace were attempting to demonstrate. Faith must become incarnate in cultural forms. The challenge of inculturation is intrinsic to our mission.

In a world and in a society of pluriform cultures, ministry on behalf of the mission of Jesus demands far more than tolerance of difference; it demands sensitivity, respect and reverence for cultural diversity. It also demands fidelity and Gospel integrity.

The challenge of inculturation raises significant questions: How aware are we in the ordinary circumstances of our daily lives that the call to discipleship is a call to inculturation? To what extent am I helping to make faith become incarnate to cultural forms? (See Avery Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," *America*, February, 1992).

The fourth challenge of the new paradigm raised in *Threads for the Loom* is the challenge of MULTICULTURALISM. The magnitude of this challenge for U.S. society as well as for religious life is substantial.

Analysis of U.S. population growth between 1980 and 1990 indicates that different ethnic groups grew at very different rates during the last decade. While the percentage of population increase for white non-Hispanics was 9.8%, that for blacks was 13.2%, Native Americans 37.9%, Asians 107.8%, and Hispanics of any race, 53.6% (Hodgkinson, *A Demographic Look at Tomorrow*, 1992). By 2000, the United States will have approximately equal numbers of blacks and Hispanics, Asians will double to about 14 million and Native Americans will increase to about three million. With respect to youth increases in population, projections for 2010 suggest that four states, California, Texas, Florida and New York will have one-third of the nation's youth and that more than half of the youth populations of these states will be "minority" (Hodgkinson, *Independent Higher Education in a Nation of Nations*, 1993).

Data like these have huge ramifications not only for ministry but also for the membership composition of religious institutes. The current membership profile of American religious is 96% white (Munley, 1992; Neal, 1991; Nygren and Ukeritis, 1992). This reality raises significant questions: Why is it that there are so few blacks, Native Americans, Asians or Hispanics in U.S. religious congregations? Are American religious and their co-workers willing to **change** and to **be changed** by welcoming persons of diverse races and cultures? Today the challenge of multiculturalism necessitates honest recognition of prejudice, ethnocentrism and racism plus a willingness to change and be changed.

In a multiracial, multicultural society, the challenge of multiculturalism is much bigger than merely becoming comfortable with cultural pluralism. It involves developing a competency to function well in two or more different cultures. It includes acknowledging, cherishing and retaining one's own primary cultural iden-

tity while at the same time developing a capacity to take on the perspective of another culture. Very concretely, multiculturalism demands willingness to learn about and experience the joys and struggles of other people and, in certain circumstances, proficiency with more than one language.

Culture provides access to the meaning systems of people. The greater the capacity to appreciate culture and cultural diversity, the greater the capacity to participate in building worlds of mutual trust and understanding. The new religious life paradigm is directed toward developing interdependence among people of diverse cultures. In a social milieu in which cultural clashes capture the headlines, persons, groups and institutions that can recognize, celebrate and enter into an experience of multiculturalism are prophetic.

In these times, a renewed grasp of the significance of culture as a shaper of identity, values, beliefs and behavior is essential for living in the truth that recognizes the fundamental dignity of every person. The paradigm shift in religious life necessitates a paradigm shift in mindsets about culture. Contemplative receptivity to such cultural forms as symbols, myths, legends, sagas and rituals is a necessary threshold for cultivating a mindset that views culture as a bridge rather than a barrier. Language and faith sharing are critical vehicles for bridging cultures. In embracing the challenge of multiculturalism, religious can play a key role in re-imagining culture as a bridge rather than a barrier.

A fifth challenge of the new paradigm is the challenge of BOUNDARY CROSSING. As used here, this phrase refers to willingness to risk new margins rather than to issues of maintaining corporate identity. In relation to the emerging religious life paradigm, boundary crossing can mean stepping to the edge of one's own culture to measure it against the life and teachings of Jesus. It can mean pioneering corporate outreach to urgent human needs. It can mean stepping into another culture as "guest" and "stranger" and risking an experience of vulnerability. It can mean following the prompting of the Spirit to a radical living of the Gospel that flows from the deepest desires yet which may be resisted because it will mean moving from the familiar, the secure, the already successful.

The challenge of boundary crossing focuses attention on a critical question for religious in these times: How willing are we individually and corporately to experience vulnerability to foster oneness with God in all things and all people? For people of faith, vulnerability is a powerful paradox. For people of faith, it is often in the poverty of weakness that the strength of grace is experienced. The 21st century will be a time for challenging self-created boundaries as well as those created by others.

A final challenge of the new paradigm that is raised in *Threads for the Loom* is the challenge of LIVING IN CONTEMPLATIVE OPENNESS. In times of

substantive change, spiritual nurturance, rootedness in the Word, faith sharing, and personal and communal prayer are absolute necessities. Contemplative receptivity is essential to prophetic liminality. In the words of Anthony de Mello, SJ, "The desert is the furnace where the apostle and the prophet are forged" (*Contact with God*, 16).

Prayer and contemplation are the energy that transform service into ministry. Thomas Merton grasped this essential connection when he said of contemplation: "It is the mark of the true mystic that, after their (sic) initiation into the mysteries of the unitive life, they are impelled in some way to serve humanity" (Chittister, *Womanstrength*, 51).

Merton's definition of contemplation has great relevance to the emerging paradigm: "Contemplation is the keen awareness of the interdependence of all things." It is learning to see with God's eyes. It is being present to God who is present to all creatures. It is, as Joan Chittister, OSB, notes, "the ability to see a whole world rather than a partial one" (Chittister, *Womanstrength*, 57). Contemplation awakens one to "the real within all that is real." It fills the human heart with reverence and awareness of the holy in all that is.

These times need to be transformed by contemplative consciousness made manifest in ministry that flows from a spirituality of wholeness, reverence, interdependence, non-violence, nurturance and reciprocity. In a time of shifting paradigms in society as well as in religious life, spiritual hungers are profound. In these times as well as in earlier moments, religious institutes and works sponsored by religious institutes have a wonderful potential to provide sacred space for expansion of constricted inner worlds. The emerging paradigm of religious life is a new opportunity for religious to challenge ourselves and others with the questions: What is really happening in and among and around us? And, how must we respond?

When people of faith ask such questions, the God who ever makes things new provides insight. The new paradigm of religious life and the prophetic liminality that it calls for demand of us that we continuously and courageously ask such questions and that we continuously and courageously respond. Vision is the warp and action is the weft for weaving a paradigm of religious life that is desperately needed in these times.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is much in both the overall LCWR Ministry findings and in the Franciscan findings that suggests the dynamism present in the ministries of U.S. women religious. In the midst of significant changes impacting society as well as religious institutes, U.S. women religious are tenaciously committed to preaching the Good News with lives that are focused on narrowing the gap between "the is" and a Gospel vision of "the ought to be." Religious institutes are not acting like dying organizations.

The data detailing current and future deployment of religious personnel in various areas of ministry suggest the importance of proactive planning to ensure

presence of religious in ministries central to the mission of a given institute and compatible with its charism. The study also underscores the desirability of expanding and enhancing programs focusing on development of lay leadership.

While the data on sponsorship project good to excellent assessment of the ability to continue sponsored works, the next five years are a critical period for developing new sponsorship models and for building and strengthening infrastructures conducive to collaboration, mission effectiveness, and flexible response to emerging needs.

It seems to me that the challenges of the new religious life paradigm and the findings of the LCWR Ministry Study have a significant implication for all of us. Paradigm shifts are graced moments for raising questions, probing implications and converting vision to action. They are times for giving birth to images.

As a social scientist, I often reflect on the interconnectedness of the past, the present and the future. As we religious move into the future it is important for us to remember that the histories of our institutes are filled with examples of boundary crossing women and men who were willing to lay down their lives for the sake of the Gospel because they were impelled by love.

These men and women did not have all of the answers in their time. Why should we? What they had and what we need are faith, hope, enthusiasm, tenacity, freedom of spirit, hearts filled with love, courage to give birth to images and deep commitment to nurturing new shoots of life.

I can find no better words to close this presentation than those of Clare: "With swift pace, light step and unswerving feet . . . go forward securely, joyfully and swiftly on the path of prudent happiness" (*Second Letter of Clare to Blessed Agnes of Prague*).

ELEMENTS OF THE NEW PARADIGM OF RELIGIOUS LIFE

Transformative Elements (LCWR/CMSM, 1989)	Components of a Future Vision (Religious Life Futures Project, 1990)	Elements of the Vision (Convergence, 1990)
Prophetic Witness	Living with Less	A Common Vision
Contemplative Attitude Toward Life	Commitment Focus	A Prophetic Mission
Poor & Marginalized Persons as the Focus for Ministry	Contemplative Attitude	A Contemplative Attitude
Spirituality of Wholeness & Global Interconnectedness	Conversion	An Intentional Covenant Community
Charism & Mission as Sources of Identity	Distributed Power	An Open, Inclusive Community
Change of the Locus of Power	Intentional Communities	A Non-Hierarchical, Participative Mode of Operation
Living with Less	"We Are Church"	An Enthusiastic & Passionate Spirit
Broad-Based, Inclusive Communities	Cultural Interdependence	
Understanding Ourselves as Church	Prophetic Witness	
Developing Interdependence Among People of Diverse Cultures	Charism	A. Munley, <i>Threads for the Loom</i> , 3
	Community Life	
	Global Spirituality	
	Preferential Option for the Poor	



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