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The Franciscan Institute  
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## Clare of Assisi: Early Documents

Revised and Expanded  
1993

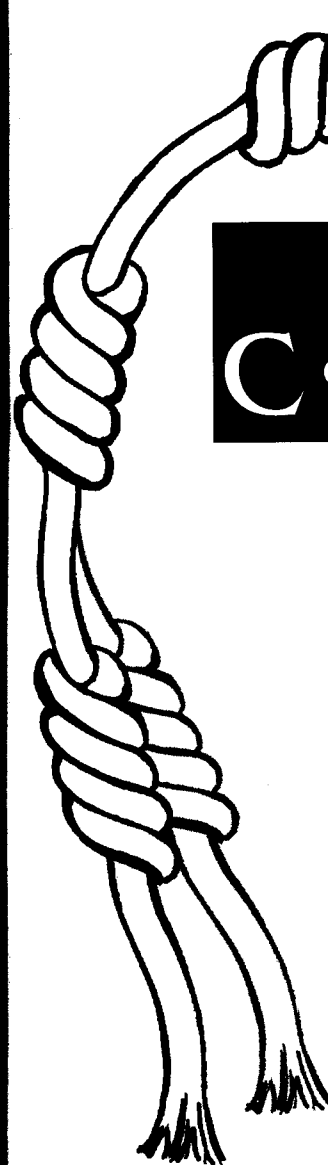
Edited and Translated by  
Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap.  
Preface by Mother Veronica Namoyo, OSC

The documents contained in this book encompass almost all the writings by or about Clare from 1212 to 1263, some translations appearing for the first time in English. They deepen awareness of Clare's place in Franciscan history and in that of religious women generally.

This revised edition contains a large number of new or expanded footnotes.

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# T · H · E C · O · R · D

Editorial.....	1
United Nations' Fiftieth Anniversary	
Mathias F. Doyle, OFM.....	5
The History of Franciscans International	
Thomas Grady, OSF.....	10
Icing on the Cake: A Reflection on Five Years as Executive Director	
Kevin Smith, OSF.....	13
Franciscans International: A Bridge for Franciscans Between Old Ways and New	
Mary Theresa Plante, FMM.....	17
Franciscans International in the Franciscan Family of Latin America	
Ignatius Harding, OFM.....	21
Franciscans International: The NGO as a Ministry	
Kathleen L. Uhler, OSF.....	25
Vaclav Havel and Francis of Assisi: The Dynamics of Transformation	
William E. McConville, OFM.....	29
Book Review.....	39
About our contributors.....	40
Announcements.....	41
On the Franciscan Circuit.....	44

**THE CORD**  
A Franciscan Spiritual Review

Editor: Elise Saggau, OSF

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NOTICE TO CONTRIBUTORS: All manuscripts for consideration should be addressed to Editor, *The Cord*, The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778.

To save unnecessary delay and expense, contributors are asked to observe the following directives:

1. MSS should be submitted on disk or typed on 8 1/2 x 11 paper, one side only, double spaced.
2. The University of Chicago *Manual of Style*, 13 ed., is to be consulted on general questions of style.
3. Titles of books and periodicals should be italicized or, in typed manuscripts, underlined.  
Titles of articles should be enclosed in quotation marks and not underlined or italicized.
4. References to Scripture sources or to basic Franciscan sources should not be footnoted, but entered within parenthesis immediately after the cited text, with period following the closed parenthesis. For example:  
(1Cor. 13:6).  
(RegNB 23:2).  
(2Cel 5:8).  
(4LAg 2:13).

A list of standard abbreviations used in *The Cord* can be found inside the back cover. The edition of the Franciscan sources used should be noted in the first reference in a mss.

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*The Cord*, 45.5 (1995)

## Editorial



Certainly Francis of Assisi was a humble man. He cherished in his life the virtue of "littleness" and the role of being "subject to all." Nevertheless, his penchant for the servant role did not make him unduly modest in terms of his dreams and hopes. Not only was the world his cloister, it was also his forum, and he did not hesitate to address himself to all people indiscriminately—the great and the small. Somehow it is not difficult to imagine Francis standing before the assembled members of the United Nations, doing his little excited dance and preaching with great intensity, calling all to "persevere in the true faith and in penance:"

All clerics, all religious men and all religious women, all lay brothers and youths, the poor and the needy, kings and princes, workers and farmers, servants and masters, all virgins and continent and married women, all lay people, men and women, all children, adolescents, the young and the old, the healthy and the sick, all the small and the great, all people, races, tribes, and tongues, all nations and all peoples everywhere on earth who are and who will be. . . (RegNB23:7).

We are not surprised to notice that in his lifetime Francis actually addressed a letter to the "Rulers of the People," in which he admonished them to hold in awe their terrible responsibility. In an interesting little ecumenical note, Francis, impressed no doubt by the practice of the Muslims, bade the Rulers to see to it that "every evening an announcement be made by a town crier or some other signal that praise and thanks may be given by all people to the all-powerful God" (EpRect 7).

With a leader of such vision how could Franciscans today do less than participate in a global forum? 1995 marks the 50th anniversary of the United Nations organization, an anniversary which coincides with the end of World War II and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Watching news these days, one is necessarily aware of the latter two anniversaries, which have had much media coverage. While many of those who remember speak of healing and reconciliation, nevertheless the reportage tends to have a tinge of nostalgia, betraying the attitudes of "the victors."

Perhaps a much more significant, hopeful and humble anniversary is that of the United Nations, founded at the very time that the last World

War came to an end. From such global calamity and unleashing of destructive power came an act of hope in the human future. The UN has struggled and continues to struggle. It has failed many times to achieve its visionary goals; yet it has survived for fifty years as a witness to its belief in what is possible for human beings who recognize the trust that is theirs.

And for the past five years the Franciscans have been there—as a Non-governmental Organization (NGO)—encouraging, supporting, witnessing, preaching by their lives; doing what Francis did in his times, speaking to the Rulers of the People a message of hope.

In this issue of *The Cord* we are happy to record the story of Franciscans International as told by those who have been at the helm of the organization. As a companion piece we offer an article by William McConville comparing Francis with Vaclav Havel, a ruler whose basic values accord with Francis's own dreams for the world.



## CHARTER OF THE UNITED NATIONS

### *We the People of the United States determined*

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and

to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and

to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and

to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

### *And for these ends*

to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and

to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security, and

to ensure, by the acceptance of principles and the institution of methods, that armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest, and

to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples,

### *Have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.*

Accordingly, our respective Governments, through representatives assembled in the city of San Francisco, who have exhibited their full powers found to be in good and due form, have agreed to the present Charter of the United Nations and do hereby establish an international organization to be known as the United Nations.

## VISION STATEMENT of FRANCISCANS INTERNATIONAL

*We are Franciscan men and women  
who are followers of  
St. Francis of Assisi.*

We believe that all creation, from the smallest organism to human beings, is in interdependent relationship on planet earth. We are aware that this relationship is threatened by a refusal to admit this interdependence, by exploitation and by domination.

We commit ourselves to encourage awareness of this interdependence so that all creation may live in harmony. We will do this by service to our own members and to United Nations personnel as well as other non-governmental organizations through collaboration, education and action regarding:

*Care of Creation  
Peace-making  
Concern for the Poor*

We see these concerns as congruent with the goals expressed by the United Nations in its Charter and in its Declaration on Human Rights.

## United Nations' Fiftieth Anniversary

Mathias F. Doyle, OFM

We the people of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war . . . (Lord make me an instrument of your peace.)

. . . To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of human persons, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small . . . (Where there is hatred let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon.)

. . . To promote progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. (Where there is despair, hope; . . . where there is sadness, joy.)<sup>1</sup>

On the twenty-fifth day of April, 1945, in Assisi, the city of St. Francis, representatives of fifty nations met to draw up a charter for world peace, justice and unity. In October of that same year the charter was put into force. On it rests the very future of us all. Its aims seem so much the embodiment of the ideals of St. Francis. Is it any wonder, then, that Franciscans throughout the world feel drawn to participate in this the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations?

Those familiar with the life of St. Francis can readily recall the occasion when Francis, kneeling before the crucifix, heard God's call to "go forth and rebuild my house."<sup>2</sup> At first he took the call literally and began to rebuild the simple churches in Assisi brick by brick. Francis soon realized that God's call was to the more demanding challenge of rebuilding the whole of God's house, i.e., to rebuild not just the church of Assisi, not just the church of Rome nor of Christianity, but of the entire people of God.

It would be easy to point out the shortcomings, even failures, of the United Nations in its founding and in its progress to date, just as it would have been easy for Francis to dismiss the church of his day as undeserving of God's love and concern. It is tempting to plead that as much as we might like to respond to God's call, the world is just too corrupt, its people too materialistic, for anyone to be able to rebuild. The survivors of World War II surely must have felt the same, but they were too close to the awful consequences of a world divided not to try at least.

Many Franciscans, mindful of our tradition and seeking to be faithful to the spirit of our founder, have sought a place at the forefront of those working for a more peaceful and a more just world. Our Franciscan presence in every part of the world and amongst every strata of society, from the poorest to the more well to do, makes us uniquely qualified to aid in this work. Our identification with the poor and with indigenous peoples gives us a voice in making their needs known, their rights respected. It is this that motivates Franciscans to work within and alongside the United Nations and its related institutions for the cause of peace, of justice, and of respect for the environment.<sup>3</sup>

Again, those familiar with the life of Francis will recall his desire to write a letter to all the leaders of the world.<sup>4</sup> He seemed to know instinctively that his own best efforts and those of his brothers and sisters would never of themselves be sufficient to his mission. If he could speak to the leaders of the world, and through them to all the world's peoples, he could hope to see his mission move forward. Can anyone doubt that Francis was there in spirit when the representatives met for the first time in the city of San Francisco? That he was there with Paul VI as he pleaded before the world's leaders for "no more war, war never again"? That he was there with John XXIII as he placed before this world his agenda for "justice and peace"?<sup>5</sup>

Anniversaries are commonly acknowledged as important events not only for the accomplishments which they celebrate, but for the promises which they hold for the future. The opportunity to chart a course for the world's peoples is a rare event indeed. It is generally recognized that the world as we knew it prior to World War II was charted by the principles of the "Peace of Westphalia" in 1648 and the refinement of these principles through the "Concert of Europe" in 1814.<sup>6</sup> Two world wars marked the failure of this system and set the stage for the effort to restructure world order in the post-war period.

The almost immediate emergence of the cold war with the clash between the two super-powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, quickly overshadowed this effort. But even during this period so dominated by constant tension and frequent confrontations, the realization of our growing interdependence and the work for greater justice in order to insure peace continued. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the movement of most of the world's population toward more open and democratic

societies sparked new hope in the hearts of us all.<sup>7</sup>

The United Nations, while not without failures, has achieved remarkable successes over the past fifty years. World conflict has been avoided. Nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction have been contained and even reduced in number. More important, the emphasis of the work of the United Nations has shifted ever so gradually from the issues of peace and security, dominated by the Security Council and its five permanent members, to the General Assembly and its Economic and Social Council. Here, nations deal with one another as equals and focus their attention on issues of human rights and human dignity, of economic and social justice and of respect for the environment.

It is too early to determine how successfully we are responding to these challenges. But, it is a unique opportunity for us to rebuild. Some would have us turn back to the principles of the past that guaranteed the powerful a privileged place. But this approach has proved incapable of guaranteeing a lasting peace. We choose to continue building on the principles of the United Nations' universal Declaration of Rights and the so-called "International Bill of Rights." Acknowledging our interdependence and working together, we seek to extend the recognition of human rights and human dignity, to promote truly "sustainable development," to foster economic well-being and economic justice without destroying our common environment, to join together to eliminate poverty and recognize and respect diversity and to promote principles of international law as a way to assure lasting peace without the threat of mutual destruction.

Franciscans International attempts to serve as a bridge for those Franciscans who see in the work of the United Nations a unique opportunity to respond to God's call to rebuild God's house today.<sup>8</sup> In joining or jointly sponsoring projects to "eliminate poverty," to "foster peace" and "to respect the environment," are we doing anything less than that? No doubt some will scoff at these efforts. But what would Francis say or do? What would Francis ask us to do?

It is important that as Franciscans we take note of this fiftieth anniversary, that we celebrate what has been accomplished, that we help correct what needs correction. And most important, in the spirit of St. Francis, we must anticipate what is promised—a world rebuilt, without poverty; a world peace based on justice and mutual respect, rather than on mutually assured destruction; a world where the environment is respected as something with which we have been entrusted for our common good and our common future.

While all Franciscans have an important part to play in these endeavors, it is especially appropriate that the Secular Franciscans lead the way. They are the ones best qualified and best situated for carrying this work forward. In a world filled with so much cynicism and which witnesses so much pain and suffering, it is not easy to sustain a positive and optimistic attitude. The Secular Franciscans counter our hesitations with Jesus' own

words: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice." They apply these words to those who work to protect the environment. "Environmental desecration," they argue, "stems from an absence of love . . . plus a lack of political will to make difficult and unpopular choices."<sup>9</sup> The same can be said of those who work for peace and for the elimination of poverty.

The "Earth Summit" in Rio in 1992 set out an agenda which would promote development based on social and economic justice. The recently completed world summit for social development saw the world leaders for the first time address the issues of poverty, respect for diversity and the right to meaningful employment for all. While much has been done, there is still so much more to be done.

As the Secretary-General has stated:

In these past months a conviction has grown, among nations large and small, that an opportunity has been regained to achieve the great objectives of the Charter—a United Nations capable of maintaining international peace and security, of securing justice and human rights and of promoting, in the words of the Charter, "social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom"<sup>10</sup>

The symbol of the recently held world summit for social development shows three people, hand in hand, standing in the world while reaching for the sun. As Franciscans do we not share this vision of people working side by side for a common goal? Such work begins and remains in the world while striving for the heavens. It is in this spirit that we as Franciscans can readily join others of good will in noting this fiftieth anniversary and working for even greater success in the future. As the Secretary General reminds us:

This is a time to rekindle the ideals of the charter, to spread the spirit of cooperation among the peoples of the world.<sup>11</sup>

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> Baehr, Peter R. *The United Nations in the 1990s*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) 159; "Peace Prayer."

<sup>2</sup> 2Cel 6:10. All quotations from and references to the writings of Francis are from the *Omnibus of Sources*, ed. Marion A. Habig (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983).

<sup>3</sup> "Franciscans International: A Non-governmental Organization," *Mustard Seed* 5/12 (June, 1933): 1-8.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Letter to the Rulers of the People.

<sup>5</sup> Paul VI, "Never Again War!" Address to the United Nations, Oct. 4, 1965 (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information) 31-43; John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, Encyclical Letter (New York: United Nations Office of Public Information) 85-124.

<sup>6</sup> Miller, Lynn H., *Global Politics*, 3rd. ed (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994) Chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> Baehr Chapter 8.

<sup>8</sup> "Franciscans and the UN: Vision Statement, *Mustard Seed* 8/2 (Mar./ Apr, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> "The Guardian of Creation," National Ecology Commission, Secular Franciscan Order, USA (Winter, 1995) 1.

<sup>10</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping," Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to the statement adopted by the summit Meeting of the Security Council on Jan. 31, 1992 (New York: United Nations, 1992) 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali 48.

*In these past months a conviction has grown, among nations large and small, that an opportunity has been regained to achieve the great objectives of the Charter—a United Nations capable of maintaining international peace and security, of securing justice and human rights and of promoting, in the words of the Charter, "social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom" (Boutros Boutros-Ghali).*

## **The History of Franciscans International**

Thomas Grady, OSF

"What took you so long to get here?" asked members of the Secretariat and non-governmental organizations when Kevin Smith, OSF, the first executive director of Franciscans International, arrived at the United Nations in 1990. The truth is that no one had thought of it before 1982, when two Franciscans, unknown to each other, suggested to their Justice and Peace Committees the idea of a Franciscan presence at the UN.

By 1984 the idea was a priority for the Justice and Peace Committees of both the English-Speaking Conference of the Friars Minor and of the Franciscan Federation of the Brothers and Sisters, Third Order Regular, of the United States. As chairperson of the latter committee, I became involved at the initial stage in 1982. By 1984 the Friars were exploring the same UN dream. When our paths crossed we all realized that this project would be most effectively served by creating one interfamilial Franciscan committee.

We first met jointly in 1984. We called the project "Franciscans at the United Nations" and ourselves the "Preparatory Committee." Our membership included at least one representative from every branch of the Franciscan family. Our strength was that we were interfamilial; our weakness was that we were not yet international.

Ann Carville, OSF, Executive Director of the Franciscan Federation, convened our first meeting in Pittsburgh and a second in Chicago in 1985, during which we surfaced numerous questions and multiple tasks. Bernadette Sullivan and I became co-chairs of the committee. We were both

in New York and able to arrange at the United Nations the meetings required to complete the application process to become a non-governmental organization. This process would take four years.

From 1985-1989 our meetings grew longer and more frequent. They were held in Cincinnati and hosted by John Quigley, OFM, a committee member. We engaged the services of George Wilson, SJ, to facilitate our work.

Our primary task in that period was the creation of a vision statement. We studied what the United Nations needed and wanted, and we reflected on those needs in the light of Franciscan values. We put our focus on three areas: peacemaking, concern for the poor and the care of creation. These three areas would determine the spheres of UN activities on which we would collaborate with the Secretariat and other non-governmental organizations.

To see if we were on the right track, we circulated the vision statement for endorsements, which we received from organizations like the International Franciscan Conference, the Conference of Ministers General, the Franciscan Federation of the US, as well as from such noted individuals as Dom Helder Camera and Cardinal Ars of Brazil, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who is a secular Franciscan, and from one of our most enthusiastic supporters, Robert Mueller, former Assistant Secretary General of the UN.

With the affirmation of the vision statement completed, we established subcommittees as a way of including grassroots Franciscans with different areas of expertise. Franciscan sister-attorneys helped us to become incorporated in the State of New York as a not-for-profit organization and to create statutes acceptable to the UN. Development directors helped us solicit funds from Franciscan institutes and to explore other funding sources. (As of yet the appeals to outside sources have been unsuccessful.) A young Franciscan intern at the UN, Mike Surufka, OFM, helped us work on models of membership and participation that were appropriate for NGOs.

We worked on all these tasks simultaneously from 1985-1989, while we continued to dream of the end result and to identify existing Franciscan networks around the world who might participate in the project. We created printed materials to promote the Franciscan NGO, began enlisting individual members and sought financial support from major superiors. Their generous responses kept us optimistic about eventually having a staff person to coordinate all the work. In the meantime, a volunteer, Mary Theresa Plante, FMM, came in once a week to computerize the data arriving from every continent.

In 1989, after submitting all of our materials to the UN, we were accepted as a non-governmental organization with the Department of Public Information (DPI). Our ultimate goal remained becoming affiliated with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) because of the consultative status attached to that recognition, but we celebrated the achievement



of being listed on the wall of the UN as an NGO and began attending the DPI weekly briefings.

In 1990 we were able to open an office. By that time John Quigley was at the OFM Curia in Rome, and Bernadette and I were major superiors of our respective congregations and, coincidentally, headquartered in the same building of the Franciscan Brothers in downtown Brooklyn. Happily, we could donate office space and, thanks to generous pledges in the US, felt financially secure enough to hire staff. That's when Kevin Smith, OSF, became the first executive director and, shortly thereafter, Jeanne Glisky, SFP, the first associate director. With Jeanne able to do most of the internal organization, Kevin was able to be actively present at the United Nations, working on committees, collaborating with the Secretariat and other NGO's. That's when they said: "What took you so long to get here?"

Since 1991 we focused on internationalizing our committee. We were no longer "Franciscans at the United Nations"—the UN doesn't let people use their name in corporate titles—we were now "Franciscans International." And we were no longer a preparatory committee—the preparations having been completed—but an executive committee who saw ourselves coordinating the project until we could be formally replaced by an interfamilial, international board. This is a goal toward which we are still striving.

The history of the 1990-1995 phase of Franciscans International is recorded elsewhere in this issue in Kevin Smith's article. Kevin and Jeanne were both elected to leadership positions in their congregations. The current staff consists of Kathleen Uhler, OSF, and Ignatio Harding, OFM, who serve as co-directors. They continue the work at the UN and at UN Summits, such as Beijing in August. A priority for Franciscans International in the next phase is forming active regional groupings of members around the world.

The dream has become huge, occasionally overwhelming! It continues to grow. The hard but rewarding venture of interfamilial collaboration shows that we all share the dream of effectively bringing to fruition the Franciscan commitment to Gospel values in the midst of the world's struggles. This has so much more possibility when the family works together. And the United Nations knows and needs that.

*The Cord*, 45.5 (1995)

## **Icing on the Cake: A Reflection on Five Years as Executive Director**

Kevin Smith, OSF

The cake was finally iced on June 14, 1995, at about nine o'clock in the evening when the NGO (non-governmental organization) Relations Committee of the Economic and Social Council voted to grant Franciscans International full consultative status—Category I.

This significant event was the fruit of five years of service to our Franciscan NGO! I had the happy privilege to be the spokesperson for our UN organization before the committee and to be in the supportive company of Kathleen Uhler, OSF, and Ignacio Harding, OFM, our new co-directors, and Mary Theresa Plante, FMM, our long-term representative at UN Headquarters in New York. On that evening we became the forty-third non-governmental organization to be accorded Category I consultative status, which means that we are privileged to make written or oral interventions at all sessions of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), have our own name plate and sit behind the member nations. We enjoy special relations with other UN bodies and are able to have additional representatives at UN headquarters in New York as well as at UN centers, such as Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi.

Our status calls and indeed imposes upon the Franciscan family the privilege and the responsibility to bring Franciscan values into the global agenda at the United Nations. However, such action is not new to the members of our family. We were granted this status only because the governments are fully aware of our 800-year legacy and our current efforts around our planet Earth in caring for the environment, in peacemaking and in



serving all our brothers and sisters in need. They recognize our potential and welcome us as collaborators.

In five years we had come a long way from our beginning efforts, when the United Nations looked to us like an alphabet soup of initials. Everyone used acronyms and it took time to get accustomed to the "UNese." With the help of many who became good friends over the years in both the nongovernmental and United Nations community, we mastered the language and became involved in activities and committees addressing the areas of concern contained in our Vision Statement.

As friendships developed we became partners with others striving to improve the quality of life on our planet Earth. Some, most especially the "civil servants" of the UN Secretariat, kept asking: "What took you so long to get here? After all, are not the goals of Franciscans akin to those expressed by the United Nations in its charter and in its Declaration on Human Rights?" And others added: "Franciscans are the 'heart' people and you can bring that caring spirit to the work of the United Nations."

We attempted to respond to these challenges and others presented to religious non-governmental organizations by both Mission and UN personnel: "The UN has all the facts on many current world problems. You have an obligation to raise spiritual and ethical dimensions to our interpretation of and response to these issues." In our efforts here we often collaborate with other Catholic NGOs with whom we meet regularly as well as other religious NGOs.

And the dream expressed by many since the early history of the Franciscan UN project moved to reality. The early dream invited all Franciscans to *imagine*:

*Just imagine*: Franciscans walking the halls of the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna. *Just imagine* Franciscans working on UN committees, . . . regularly transmitting information on critical international issues, . . . communicating concerns about and offering possible solutions to pressing social problems, . . . operating an international office to help channel the energy of the Franciscan family and respond to the needs of the powerless and marginalized on a global basis. *Just imagine!*

*Just imagine*: Franciscan men and women, secular and regular, old and young, Franciscans from many nations—speaking different languages—representing many cultures contributing to a concrete, unmistakable Franciscan presence at the United Nations, the world's foremost forum for conflict resolution. *Just imagine!*

*Just imagine*: Franciscans proclaiming to all their commitment to peace-making, their concern for the poor and their care for creation. *Just imagine!*

*Just imagine*: (adapted from John Lennon) imagine there are no boundaries, it isn't hard to do, nothing to kill or die for and no one starving too; imagine all the people living life in peace. Perhaps we are but dreamers—though not the only ones—come join us so the world will live as one.

Franciscans participated in Preparatory Committee sessions, regional

consultations and United Nations Conferences. Our first efforts were in the area of Environment and Development (the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio). In preparation for this event, members sponsored think-tanks addressing, in particular, the spiritual and ethical issues addressed in the conference documents and developed position papers on some issues. At Rio, Franciscans sponsored fasts and prayer vigils, held press conferences and worked diligently to realize global agreements for sustainable development. Since the Earth Summit, Franciscans have brought Agenda 21 (the conference document) to educational, religious and environmentally concerned audiences around the world through sponsorship of workshops, conference and educational programs as well as participating in the follow-up programs sponsored by the Commission on Sustainable Development. Rio was just the beginning as our efforts moved along with the United Nations agenda and saw similar action by our membership in the conference processes for: Human Rights (Vienna, 1993); Small Island Developing States (Barbados, 1994); Population (Cairo, 1994); Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995); Women (Beijing, 1995); UN Fiftieth Anniversary (1995); Human Settlements (1995-96).

Simultaneously, our membership roster expanded, area and regional groups developed, liaison people surfaced and members shared information about their activities and their working relationships with United Nations programs and agencies.

Our international office began as a one-person operation in Brooklyn (New York), ably assisted by Mary Theresa Plante, FMM, serving as a UN-NGO representative. Gradually we grew, and over the years we added an associate director (first Jeanne Glisky, SFP, and then Kathie Uhler, OSF), volunteer religious support personnel, student interns, office volunteers, and global family participation in non-governmental and United Nations Committees, programs and events in New York. Just to use one example, in our preparations for the World Social Summit this past March, we actively participated with an interfamilial delegation numbering fifteen people at each of the three preparatory meetings and made two significant interventions at the August, 1994, and January, 1995, preparatory sessions. In addition to the international office staff, our delegation included representatives from Brazil, France, the Philippines, Slovakia, Spain and the United States. And we had for the first time people who participated throughout the entire preparation and at the Summit—most notably, Mike Surufka, OFM, and Francis Matthews, OFM, who lent us their time and talents and were a tremendous asset.

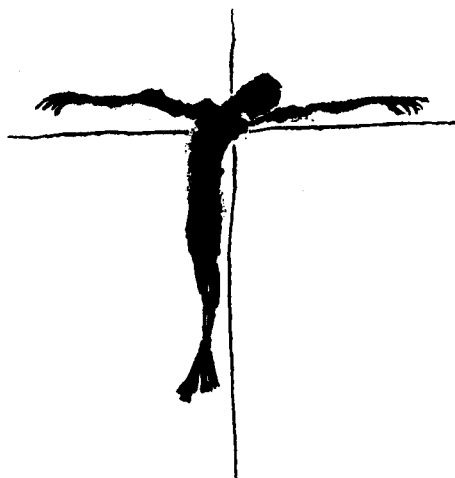
We also moved from Brooklyn to office space in Holy Family Church, which is just a few steps from United Nations Headquarters. This move, plus the involvement of a truly international Executive Committee and the personal support over our brief history, enabled us to become a more effective nongovernmental organization.

We have worked closely with other nongovernmental organizations

in sponsoring events, in lobbying, in proposing statements to various UN agencies. We have collaborated with UN personnel and brought speakers (e.g., Tom Grady, OSF, and Ken Himes, OFM) into the United Nations to share our Franciscans values. We have served on and chaired NGO and UN committees and boards. And we have worked with the missions of Member States with whom we are in regular communication to improve the quality of life for all our sisters and brothers.

Just as St. Francis did not hesitate to address himself to the rulers of the world in his day and through them to the peoples of the world, Franciscans International has attempted to share the greeting of Francis's "Peace and All Good!" with the world community.

Yes, brothers and sisters, you have brought us to this moment through your prayer, action and support. It has been a unique privilege to witness the global recognition of the charism that Franciscans incarnate. Thank you and *ad multos annos*.



## **Franciscans International: A Bridge for Franciscans Between Old Ways and New**

Mary Theresa Plante, FMM

Peace is not something you can buy or sell. We know that we need it but we don't often know how to possess it. It cannot be produced instantly. The same is true for the environment. We can see what is happening around us and in our own country, but to be able to realize the vast destruction of our planet is often beyond our ability to understand.

Perhaps that also is what happens when we are involved with the poor. We see people who are poor, but how do we comprehend the billions in the world lacking even basic necessities and without any possibility of changing their situation?

Three core values of care of creation, peacemaking and concern for the poor emerged as concepts around which a Franciscan agenda was organized within the purview of the United Nations.

Robert Muller, former Assistant to three United Nations Secretaries General, has said: "There are many groups and people who help the poor but rare are those who like the Franciscans have an integral, spiritual vision of humanity, of all life, of nature, of our planet and of our place and role in the universe and in time."<sup>1</sup>

It becomes a challenge to the Franciscan family to see beyond our immediate environment and be concerned for all peoples. As individuals we have this experience, but we need to see that collectively we have an opportunity to speak out as the Franciscan family and be witnesses and

prophets on a different level in our society.

Franciscans International provides this bridge between old ways and new. Brother Hermann Schalück, OFM, Minister General, has said: "We must pass over from a mentality which looks at our ministry as solely service to the 'Church' community to one which sees Franciscan ministry as a collaborative service to and within the larger family of the United Nations."<sup>2</sup>

Rose Fernando, FMM, International Peace and Justice Coordinator for the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, stated a similar message in a different way: "For too long we have failed to see the global interconnectedness in local problems, with little attention given to the structural and systemic causes of many of the ills we seek to alleviate. Our mission has suffered in the process."<sup>3</sup>

Since 1989, I have been privileged to be on this journey with Franciscans International in a new way of seeing the universality of mission, a mission without borders. During the first months as I walked along the halls at the United Nations, attended conferences, interacted with people from various cultures of the then 159 countries that made up the United Nations, I pondered, what we were doing there. Gradually, I saw the worldwide concern of the United Nations for many of the same issues that concerned Franciscans.

The UN was willing to listen and invited input. This then became a new challenge. Did we have something to say? Could we offer some practical solution to the issues concerning women, children, education, child labor, human rights, environment, family, housing, cities, youth, debt, trade, refugees, unemployment, freedom of religion on a world level? These are problems that no one country can solve on its own. Global problems need global solutions which require the integration of spirituality, ethical and moral values. Could our input be expressed in a way that valued life, all life?

The empowerment of people of every age is taking place rapidly around the globe due to networking through telecommunications, fax, E-mail and Internet. Local people are organizing themselves to deal with local issues and gathering support from international organizations.

The signs of the times call us to look at the world with missionary and contemplative eyes as we work locally and globally. We need to seize the moment wherever we are, to join with others, to participate where we can, to be willing to take the first step and to bring a missionary spirit to our work. We are seen as a religious people with no hidden agenda, looking out for the good of people everywhere.

There are simple things we can do. Preparation for the United Nations Environmental Conference held in Rio (1992), inspired Franciscans International to start the Plant-a-Tree Project with more than 70,000 trees planted in over fifty countries. At the FMM Neuville Nursery School in Pakistan, children between ages three to five participated in the project.

They planted five trees, and their teacher, Minda Valencia, FMM, asked them: "Have you thanked a green plant today?" This brought enthusiastic responses. From Mexico came a story of how the FMM's planted fruit and shade trees. All were given different names in the English, African and Asian languages whereby the "godmothers" took a greater interest in their continued well-being.

Since the FMM's are located in seventy-six countries, a very real sharing of mission experiences is beginning to focus not only on the work they do but on the more global connections that cause the problems. A recent meeting of FMM's in Jakarta, Indonesia, focused on the injustices suffered by poor farmers and proposed an appeal to Franciscans International to work for the restructuring of the UN.

From France came a "Message to Franciscans International" from a meeting of FMM's considering Peace and Justice which "condemned exclusion, violence and degradation of the environment," They requested Franciscans International to collaborate with other NGO's in following developments in the countries of the southern hemisphere, their educational needs and problems with AIDS.

Some FMM sisters in Italy have joined with the group ACAT (Action of Christians for the Abolition of Torture), an international ecumenical movement. Dina, another FMM working with the Jesuit Service for Refugees in a camp in Burundi, sent a long letter to Franciscans International pleading the case of the refugees there.

The UN International Year of the Family, 1994, provided an opportunity to study family structures in Pakistan, Italy, Australia, Peru and India, among others. Consciousness was raised and experiences were shared.

Another issue of international concern taken up by the FMM's has to do with land mines and the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines. This has provoked Franciscans International to join others at the United Nations in drawing attention to the millions of land mines still in the ground. Long after the wars are over, the killing goes on. In 1995, the United Nations will convene a Review Conference aimed at improving landmines protocol.

Now, Beijing and the International Women's Conference beckon to a new depth of awareness. The problems of women of various countries are amazingly similar. We learn that violence against women is the most common problem world-wide; illiteracy is also high on the list. The Ethiopian/Kenya FMM journal has just published the concerns of the African women given at the United Nations regional meeting in Africa. It is their statement of what is important to them in the global plan of action that will come out of the Women's Conference in Beijing.

Franciscans International is a bridge with the United Nations that helps deepen our understandings of the desperate needs of our planet, the destruction of our environment, the billions of people without proper housing, food and basic necessities of life.

We now not only work with members of our own congregation in serving refugees, migrants, and persons with AIDS, but also inter-congregationally. We collaborate as well with other groups, whether Christian or not. Sometimes we join groups that work internationally, but wherever we go we bring our religious beliefs and spirituality with us.

The prophetic dimension of both the missionary and religious aspects of our lives and our personal journey of faith leads us to consider the "passover," which Father Hermann speaks about and the greater necessity of "changing the structures and systemic causes" of injustice as stressed by Rose Fernando, using the "bridge" of Franciscans International to help us do this.

Let our prayer be: Lord what do you want us to do together?

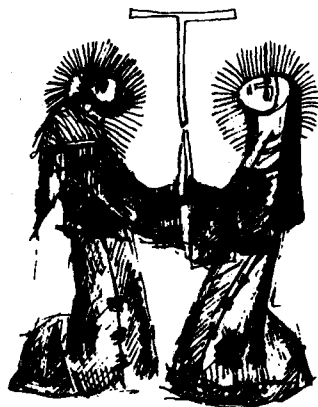
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#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> International Franciscan Conference, Assisi, May 14-20, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann Schalück, OFM, in a talk to OFM International Peace and Justice meeting, NY.

<sup>3</sup> *International Journal of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary* (May, 1994) 21.



*The Cord*, 45.5 (1995)

## Franciscans International: The NGO as a Ministry

Kathleen L. Uhler, OSF

The Franciscans belong at the United Nations as an NGO (non-governmental organization) because they have a deep concern and reverence for creation, they are involved in peacemaking, and care enormously about the poor. The Franciscans would make a vital contribution to the ongoing debate about these issues. (Desmond Tutu, SSF [Anglican Society of St. Francis], Archbishop of Capetown, South Africa.)

Tremendous enthusiasm is easily generated for the presence of Franciscans in an official capacity at the United Nations. But just what this means, "being an NGO," often remains obscure and much beyond the inner circle of UN-related personnel.

### The Relationship of NGO's to the United Nations.

Historically, the non-governmental organization and its members, both known as "NGO's," have enjoyed a special relationship with the United Nations. The drafters of the United Nations Charter foresaw the necessity of a non-governmental balance over against the preponderance of governmental delegations at the UN. Article 71 of the Charter ensures the existence of NGO's under the aegis of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC):

The Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are con-

cerned with matters within its competence.

Most of the nearly 1,700 NGO's are international in their membership and, because of this, bring to bear an important balance vis-a-vis the Member States—the scope of NGO concerns cross national boundaries. NGO's are not bound by the agendas and politics of individual nations. "Relationship" is a key word to describe the purpose of an NGO. Through accreditation with either ECOSOC or the UN Department of Public Information (DPI), NGO's become integral parts of a global action network, providing channels through which information concerning the UN, its related agencies and programs, reaches the public around the world.

NGO's have launched the international years for the family, peace, the child and disabled persons; they have convened world conferences and parallel NGO events on the environment, youth, women, the aging, population, shelter and food. More and more, the UN is becoming dependent upon the human and material resources of NGO's to implement its relief and rehabilitation programs, to monitor elections, to clear landmine fields and to facilitate peacekeeping operations.

#### The Franciscan NGO as Ministry.

Our cooperation with the United Nations has . . . a very practical logic. It gives us the opportunity to link people of good will to overcome injustice and suffering. We have to do together what nobody will be able to accomplish alone or as one branch of the [Franciscan] family" (Hermann Schalück OFM, Minister General, "Address to International OFM Council for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation," United Nations, New York, Oct. 27, 1993).

The spirit of Francis of Assisi permeates the Franciscan movement through the ages, so that today it is possible to view the characteristics of our patron saint operative within the membership and work of Franciscans International. The values embraced within its aims and structures and modeled by its governance and members testify that "being an NGO" can be an authentic form of Franciscan ministry. Some Franciscan values that stand out in the NGO context are inclusivity, and its related values of ecumenism and "family-feeling"; evangelization; and propensities for direct service and peacemaking.

Membership in Franciscans International includes persons from every continent and from 137 countries (as of 1994). Current individual, active members number over 17,000 with the potential of 1.2 million, the worldwide Franciscan population.

The membership reflects the familial nature of Franciscanism: men and women from the Secular Franciscan Order; men and women religious who follow the Third Order Rule; the Poor Clares of the Second Order; the First Order Capuchins, Conventuals and Friars Minor, the Anglican Soci-

ety of St. Francis and other Franciscan communities. There are clerics and laity, married and single persons, active and contemplative lifestyles. The membership is ecumenical, inclusive of Franciscans from Episcopal, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Roman Catholic churches.

The work of Franciscans International is evangelical, attempting to model for the United Nations a way of being community that transcends national boundaries and sovereignties and, of greater importance, that regards every human being of equal worth and the earth a common good. As NGO's with a spiritual formation and an evangelical mission, Franciscans minister by their presence and collaborative witness.

This orientation suits exceptionally well the expanding range of peace operations undertaken by the UN. The following is an excerpt from the UN Secretary General's Report of September, 1993, on preventive diplomacy:

Once an elusive and undefined concept, preventive diplomacy is now becoming understood as a vital field for practical action. New forms of preventive diplomacy have evolved in the course of the past year; it incorporates efforts designed to prevent the occurrence of armed conflict, such as factfinding, good offices and goodwill missions, the dispatch of special envoys to tense areas, and efforts to bring parties to a potential conflict to the negotiating table. Today, the variety of challenges faced by the United Nations has led to a more intensive and creative use of such familiar techniques (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Report, page 97).

Franciscans are found "on the ground" in every "hot spot" on the globe. Examples of Franciscans International members' activities in collaboration with UN peacekeeping operations include:

In 1993-1994, small groups of adult Franciscan students of Zaire were organized to work with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) on educational development projects and with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on its work with Angolan refugees.

A lone, European friar member transported food and relief supplies three or four times a week from Burundi to 40,000 refugees in Kabgayi, Rwanda throughout the months of May and June, 1994.

Franciscan friar and sister members have worked extensively in recent years with UNHCR in Jamaica, Bosnia, Iraq, Zaire and other countries.

#### Franciscans International, a Prophetic Voice

It sounds incredible, but Lenin himself once said: "It would have taken only ten Francises of Assisi to save Russia." Let's multiply the saints and the whole world will be saved (John Paul I, *Gente Veneta*, 2: 38

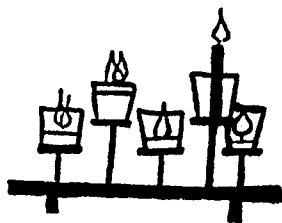
[1976]).

As the twenty-first century approaches, the longing becomes more acute for a better world, one that is united, reconciled, healed, and made whole once more. Through its NGO ministry, Franciscans International is called and empowered to participate in shaping the agenda for this new world order. The Franciscan worldview exalts simplicity, humility, charity and joy. The UN community challenges Franciscans to be its internal critic and prophet; to confront the control and exploitation of peoples and of the earth's resources; to call for just and loving relationships among nations; and to discern and interpret God's evolutionary plan for the universe.

In the words of Robert Muller, Chancellor, University for Peace, Costa Rica, former UN Assistant Secretary-General:

This is the plane on which the Franciscans can make their greatest contribution to the mission of the United Nations, by proclaiming the centrality, the beauty and the immense riches of spirituality for the healing of the wounds of this world. There are many groups and people who help the poor, who promote and advocate peace and disarmament, who defend and help save the environment and nature, but rare are those who like the Franciscans have an integral, spiritual vision of humanity, of all life, of nature, of our planet and of our place and role in the universe and in time (International Franciscan Conference, Assisi, May 14-20, 1989).

The Testament that Franciscans International bequeaths to the United Nations in 1995, its fiftieth anniversary year, and into the twenty-first century, is this: to rediscover and maintain faithfully the spirit of our founder, Francis, as the Church directs us in *Perfectae Caritatis* and to solve problems by pursuing the way of love, announcing always, as did Francis: "Peace and all good! *Pace e bene!*"



*The Cord*, 45.5 (1995)

## VACLAV HAVEL AND FRANCIS OF ASSISI: THE DYNAMICS OF TRANSFORMATION

William E. McConville, O.F.M.

This lecture was delivered as the inaugural lecture in the Clare Center Lecture Series at Siena College, Albany, NY, on October 3, 1994.

From one perspective Francis of Assisi and Vaclav Havel could not be more different from one another. Francis of Assisi was a thirteenth century Italian who, opting out of his worldly and ambitious style of life, felt the call to live the Gospel in a most radical and literal way. This was symbolized most visibly in his embrace of poverty and the poor. Attracted by his holiness, men and women from every strata of society sought to join him in his life of humble discipleship. Thus, under his leadership, the order of little brothers (Friars Minor), the order of the poor ladies (the Poor Clares), and the third order came to be. He died in 1226, marked by the wounds of his crucified Lord.

Havel, on the other hand, is definitely a man of this century. Born in Prague in 1936, he attended school there. His first love was the theater. He began working at the Theater of the Balustrade in Prague, where he was everything from stage hand to director. He authored numerous plays, among them *The Garden Party*, *The Memorandum*, *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Mountain Hotel*. In 1977 he was arrested and jailed for four months because of his Charter 77 activities, which involved public criticism of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. In 1979 his work on behalf of democratic rights brought another conviction and a jail sentence of four and a half years. International outcry forced the shortening of that sentence. In

1989 Havel found himself at the forefront of Czechoslovakia's "velvet revolution," when he helped to found the Civic Forum that negotiated the communists' relinquishment of power. In an extraordinary reversal of fortune he was elected president of Czechoslovakia in 1989, and in January, 1993, he was elected president of the Czech Republic.

In obvious ways Francis of Assisi and Vaclav Havel could not be more different: a thirteenth century Italian Catholic, committed to the imitation of Christ and to preaching conversion to the Christians of his time and a twentieth century Czech playwright and intellectual of deep religious sensibilities but no apparent confessional commitment, now the chief magistrate of his nation. There are, however, some interesting surface similarities. Although not a professional playwright or dramaturge, Francis certainly shared Havel's penchant for the theatrical or the dramatic. Remember the manner in which he would walk through a town, provoking both sympathy and hostility. There was, of course, a pageant he staged in Greccio, wonderfully recreating the birth of Jesus. On a deeper level, though, both Francis and Havel shared a common destiny; they began their respective life-work as charismatic "outsiders," attracted men and women to their cause and found themselves presiding over large institutions—for Francis a religious order and for Havel a national government. In both these men there is a refreshing modesty, a sense of limit and proportion. Neither is adverse to praising a virtue such as humility. Both Francis and Havel show an extraordinary respect for other human beings. Francis has often been celebrated for his "courtesy," while Havel seems to exemplify his own insistent call for civility or what he calls "public manners." They might have enjoyed one another's company.

The similarities, however, run deeper than demeanor or rhetoric. Havel explores some fascinating themes when he addresses the means by which public life can be transformed and renewed, e.g. living in the truth, interdependence, the primacy of conscience, transcendence, recognizing limits of technology and the presence of mystery. It is such a refreshing change from the kind of political rhetoric omnipresent in our society. At the same time, so much of Havel's thinking resonates with the vision, values and practice of Francis of Assisi.<sup>1</sup>

#### Havel: A Man of Our Times

One is immediately struck by the concrete, existential character of Havel's project. He is dealing with life under very specific conditions: in his earlier essays, life under the communist tyranny (post-totalitarian dictatorship), and in his later pieces, the experience of a society coming to grips with its new-found freedoms. Thus his point of departure will often be a reflection on an experience from his own life; e.g. as a small boy encountering on the way to school a hurriedly built factory soiling the environment or the action of a greengrocer who calls on the workers of the

world to unite by placing a sign in his window amidst the carrots and celery and then one day removes the sign. Perhaps this reflects the sensibilities of the playwright who is anchored in the complexity and ambiguity of human action.

This approach, however, is emblematic of his prioritizing life over system. Havel, throughout his work, paints a painful portrait of the effects on human life of the system created by a post-totalitarian dictatorship. It is a world in which the self-preservation of the system is the supreme value; it is the role of individuals to serve that system. In Havel's view this results in the profane trivialization of the human. Persons merge into the anonymous crowd where the supreme virtues are conformity and uniformity. Critical intelligence is sacrificed to ideology; in place of reality is created "a world of appearances, a mere ritual, a formalized language deprived of semantic contact with reality and transformed into a system of ritual signs that replace reality with pseudo-reality."<sup>2</sup> Those who participate in the system become both agents of its automatism (its taken-for-granted self-maintenance) and victims of its goals. For Havel those who dwell within this system are living in the lie, the trivialization and fallenness of their own existence hidden from them.

Life, of course, has a quite different dynamism. Genuine life expresses itself in independent self-constitution, in free self-organization. The result is an extraordinary manifestation of plurality and diversity, "infinitely and mysteriously multiform."<sup>3</sup> This free expression of being is intimately connected with humanity's rightful dignity, with moral integrity, with the primacy of conscience. Absolutely essential for life to emerge in its fullness is the recognition that human beings exist most radically, not as part of an oppressive structure, but as part of nature, of the universe, indeed of the order of Being. In other words, the emergence of authentic "life" in all its richness and integrity is inextricably bound up with the recognition of transcendence as constitutive of the human, a transcendence that binds human beings to one another, to nature and to the mysterious reality of God.

This rootedness in the "natural world" [*Lebenswelt*] is a consistent theme for Havel. It has the character of a "pre-reflective meaningfulness" about it: "That is the world of our lived experience, a world not yet indifferent since we are bound to it in our love, hatred, respect, contempt, tradition. . . ." Further, "In this world, categories like justice, honor, treason, friendship, infidelity, courage, or empathy have a wholly tangible content, relating to actual persons and important for actual life."<sup>4</sup>

Coherence in this world is grounded, for Havel, in something beyond its horizon, something beyond our grasp. Havel again: "The natural world, in virtue of its very being, bears within it the presupposition of the absolute which grounds, delimits, animates, and directs it, without which it would be unthinkable, absurd, and superfluous, and which we can only quietly respect. Any attempt to spurn it, master it, or replace it with some-



thing else, appears within the framework of the natural world, as an expression of hubris for which humans must pay a heavy price, as did Don Juan and Faust."<sup>5</sup> Modern attempts to do just that, such as certain forms of rationalism, technology and science, have in effect denied the importance of personal experience, including the experience of mystery and the absolute. As many have argued before and since, the diminution of God has resulted in the diminution of human beings.

But what has the greengrocer to do with any of this? One day he decides to remove the communist slogan from his window. In this simple gesture he chooses to live in the truth; he shatters the world of appearances. In effect, he declares that the emperor has no clothes. Thus living in the truth is not ordinarily a series of grand gestures, but consists in small things which shape a mood or an environment. "You simply straighten your backbone and live in greater dignity as an individual."<sup>6</sup> Thus the confrontation between the possibilities of life and the demands of a post-totalitarian system begins at the level of human consciousness and conscience, at the existential level. While every act of freedom in the midst of complex and subtle manipulation is a political act, such existential actions are pre-political, because they are not part of the political process. Eventually, individuals, who have pierced through the veil of illusion and are capable of courageous acts of freedom, become part of a second culture, an alternate structure, a parallel polis.

The "parallel polis" is not a ghetto. It is, rather, a second culture with its own publishing houses, its concerts and theater performances, its religious formation. It is "an area where a different life can be lived, a life that is in harmony with its own aims and which in time structures life in harmony with those aims."<sup>7</sup> Far from being an act of self-absorption, the creation of the parallel polis is an act of responsibility *to* and *for* the whole. The transforming power of the alternate polis, however, resides in its unremitting commitment to live in the truth. This results in a dramatic tension with the power structure, which can respond in a variety of ways, e.g. co-option, adaptation or internal differentiation. Eventually, however, the regime will wither away, but perhaps not before some last-ditch effort at control and survival à la George Orwell. But for Havel, the political structures which emerge are less important than the renewal of the human order which grounds the political structures. These latter will always be limited and unsatisfying.

Political structures must serve the ends of life; they must enable men and women to live freely, truthfully and in quiet dignity. What is called for is a moral reconstitution of society, a renewal of the relationship of human beings to one another. "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—those factors clearly indicate the direction in which we must go."<sup>8</sup> Yet this renewal of human order can only be accomplished through the rediscov-

ery of God. In this connection Havel often quotes the obscure pronouncement of Martin Heidegger: "Only a God can save us now!" As he reminded his American audience on July 4, 1994, transcendence is the real alternative to extinction. Freedom can only flourish if human beings do not forget the One who is the source of this gift.

The transcendence of which he speaks so eloquently repositions human beings within a larger human and natural structure; it is a transcendence that recognizes profound "interdependence." He cites the anthropic cosmological principle which affirms that humanity is not an accidental anomaly, an unhappy bit of mildew whirling in space. Rather, we must recognize that "we are mysteriously connected to the entire universe, we are mirrored in it, just as the entire evolution of the universe is mirrored in us."<sup>9</sup> We remain unique and singular within the universe. At the same time, we are deeply connected with the earth, with Gaia. What we do to violate her will ultimately result in the wounding of our own humanity. Thus we must recover the dynamics of self-transcendence. He explains:

Transcendence as a hand reached out to those close to us, to foreigners, to the human community, to all living creatures, to nature, to the universe; transcendence as a deeply and joyously experienced need to be in harmony with what we ourselves are not, what we do not understand, what seems distant from us in space and time, but with which we are mysteriously linked because, together with us, all this constitutes a single world.<sup>10</sup>

This is extraordinary language from a political leader!

Francis: A Man for Our Times

A bridge to Francis of Assisi is provided by Havel himself, who asserts that "any genuinely meaningful point of departure in an individual's life has an element of universality about it."<sup>11</sup> Permit me to expand that statement to include not simply an individual's point of departure but the journey and the destination as well. No one can deny that the conversion, pilgrimage and destiny of the mendicant preacher who spent the bulk of his life in a narrow slice of central Italy during the first quarter of the thirteenth century has captured the mind and the imagination of countless men and women from every level of society, from every culture and from every religious tradition. In an uncanny way Francis mirrors in his own context the processes for social renewal and transformation which Havel so eloquently portrays. Furthermore, Francis supports and complements Havel's more encompassing moral agenda. Both raise issues about the relationship between citizenship and discipleship.

Havel's greengrocer made the fateful move from living in the lie to living in the truth by removing the sign with the slogan from his shop window. Francis's gestures were more dramatic (he was an Italian after

all), but no less courageous. He embraced a leper, took cloth from his father's shop and sold it to finance the rebuilding of a church and, when his father dragged him before the bishop, he stripped himself naked and cried out: "Now I can truly say, 'Our Father who are in heaven.'" The direction of his journey would become clearer sometime later when he heard the words of Matthew's Gospel and felt the call to evangelical preaching and mendicancy. But wherein lay the lie and wherein lay the truth?

The young Francis had accepted the ethos of his father and of his father's class. These were the "new men" who were gradually constituting the emerging middle class. Artisans and merchants, they were flocking to urban centers and profiting enormously from the opportunities for manufacturing and trade. A new world was developing in which money, capital and credit were becoming increasingly important. Francis enjoyed the pleasures which this new world afforded and shared his father's hope that through newly acquired wealth they would someday be joined to a place among the aristocracy. He was also reared in a church in which the higher clergy were often merely warriors with miters and the lower clergy were uneducated and incapable of meeting the spiritual needs of the educated laity. Those on the margins, the truly poor, indigent and ignorant (the *minores*), were ignored and powerless.

Francis's move into the truth began when he rejected money as the source of value and meaning for a human life, recognized the dignity of the *minores*, the little ones, chose to live in solidarity with them and heard the call of the Gospel to rebuild and renew a ruined church. He saw through the ideology of money to the more fundamental reality of the dignity and goodness of persons regardless of class and penetrated through the walls of a petrified church to see the transforming possibility of living the Gospel simply and joyfully.

His discovery of the truth and his commitment to live it unleashed in an almost miraculous way the triumph of life over system. He experienced the freedom of the Gospel and out of that freedom a new and different form of religious life came to be. (Francis was not alone in this; Dominic Guzman was a companion.) The mendicant movement in the thirteenth century manifested an energy, a vitality and a creativity which was quite astonishing. In its novelty it was able to respond to the new demands of urban dwellers. The variety of ministries, the sophistication which the friars were to bring to the confessional and to development of a lay spirituality, and their willingness to engage passionately in the intellectual struggle of their age gave evidence of the depth and integrity of their lives. There were those who resented their presence and called for their condemnation because they had altered the system. To them the friars could say: Do not judge us by the patterns of the past but by what we are doing now and by what we shall do in the future.

In Havel's language all of this began for Francis as an existential transformation, as a profound change in consciousness and conscience. Francis's

language is quite simple: he says that he began to do penance. He underwent a conversion. He remained throughout his life a preacher of penance, a caller to conversion. His message was uncomplicated: Recognize the presence of a loving, humble God who chose to come among us as the poorest of the poor; be willing to dispossess yourselves of all those things that provide security and are the source of domination (e.g. money and certain kinds of knowledge); respect the dignity of every person; reject violence and be energetically engaged in making peace and effecting reconciliation. Of course, more powerful, more compelling, more attractive than any of the words he spoke was the life he lived. Men and women of every stripe chose to walk the way he walked. In effect what began to develop was a way of living and working together which was a parallel structure to both society and church, an alternative "holy polis."

Francis did not reject the contemporary structures of authority, either ecclesial or political. He was insistent on being a Catholic and had no doubt that in the preaching, teaching and sacraments of the church he received grace, spirit and life. In regard to political authority he seems to accept the admonition found in 1 Peter 2:13: "Be subject to every human institution for God's sake." And yet he shaped a fraternal life, as Clare shaped a sororal life, which was radically egalitarian, non-hierarchical. "[H]e chose to take his place with those who were on the lowest rung of the social ladder and to offer the brotherhood of the Gospel to every class in society. . . ." <sup>12</sup> As Celano remarks, he wanted his sons to live in amity as if brought together and natured by one spirit, one father and one mother. He wanted the greater to be joined to the lesser, the wise to be united with the simple by brotherly affection. "With God," he said, "there is no respect of persons, and the Minister General of the order, the Holy Spirit, rests equally upon the poor and simple." He wanted this thought inserted into his Rule, but since the Rule was already approved by a papal Bull, this could not be done. <sup>13</sup> Clare of Assisi followed Francis in basing sisterhood "on total equality under the unifying influence of absolute poverty." <sup>14</sup> To an encompassing society deeply stratified this was indeed a dramatic counter witness.

How did the Franciscan movement in its diverse manifestations fulfill its mission: the conversion of men and women to a deeper living of the Gospel? Havel's description of the dynamics of the parallel polis in Czechoslovakia could have been taken out of the early Franciscan chronicles. Havel gives great weight to the styles of popular culture, e.g. poetry, music (even rock music) and theater. When Francis began to live in the truth, he did not leave behind the ballads and love songs which he sang so well. According to Celano he would imitate "the troubadors of Provence, singing the melodies he had learned from them or dancing around like them while he preached." <sup>15</sup> He preached in the vernacular and sang in the vernacular. His "Canticle of the Creatures" is testimony to the power of his use of language. At the same time he had a marvelous sense of the theatrical. He would walk naked into a church both to demonstrate his absolute poverty

before the people and to show his solidarity with a brother he had condemned to do exactly the same. His enactment of the nativity of Christ in Greccio changed forever the manner in which Christians celebrated the feast of the Nativity. As entertaining as all of these things were, their goal was conversion and transformation of the minds and hearts of the faithful.

Havel's contention is that life will generate the structures which are expressive of its deepest aims. Francis's emphasis on poverty, while rooted in a fresh and direct reading of the Gospel, was to insure that life lived together would not be based upon appropriation, on the accumulation of goods, but upon dispossession. The brothers were to live without anything of their own. At the same time styles of personal exaltation, also barriers to genuine fraternal life, were to be avoided. Leadership was understood in a very functional way; those with authority were referred to as "guardians" or "ministers."

Francis's polis, any more than Havel's, did not come into being as a self-absorbed enclave, concerned for its own salvation, but as reality responsible to and for the whole. Francis and the movement he began had an enormous impact on the medieval experience. This has been engagingly recounted in C. H. Lawrence's recent work on the influence of the friars.<sup>16</sup> Although the structures of the church were not altered, except perhaps in the separation of benefices from ministry, the friars were able to by-pass them. Thus they overcame institutional inertia, became agents of reform and were able to meet the pastoral demands of a new age. "The urban poor as well as the rural peasantry had the Gospel preached to them. . . . The devout life, hitherto regarded as the exclusive occupation of clergy and enclosed religious, had been made available to the laity. . . . The mendicant schoolmen had given fresh life and a new orientation to Western theology and philosophy."<sup>17</sup>

The broader societal implications of Francis's vision are difficult to discern. In the view of those considerably more competent in these matters, Francis did, in Havel's terms, bring power to the powerless. It has been noted that Francis "tried to integrate the *pauperes* and *minores* into the process of social development and growth."<sup>18</sup> LeGoff asserts that "the basic question to which Francis and his companions devoted themselves was that of integrating this pauper society into history."<sup>19</sup> Thus his social ideal was not of a pauper society, but "a leveling and a maximum of equality, marked by the same notion of fraternity which inspired his religious movement."<sup>20</sup> His vision was of a society, spiritually transformed and reconciled by the Gospel, where all forms of domination based on power, riches or knowledge had been put aside. He was always the peacemaker rather than the revolutionary. Did much change? His disciples, with their refusal to take an oath or bear arms, had some impact on the collapse of feudal structures. Campagnola suggests that his impact took place over a long period of time: "His religious vision accelerated the progress of human history in his time by inserting the new popular spirit into history. But perhaps he

also instilled in it a pessimistic notion of power and the powerful, together with a political pessimism, all of which would bear fruit later."<sup>21</sup> If he is right, Havel and Francis are kindred spirits indeed.

Permit a final comment on transcendence and interdependence. For Francis transcendence was a given. He lived in a world shot through with the presence of the all-high, all-good, all-loving God. His life was a surrender to the reality of God. Because of this he was able to live in the transcendence so succinctly sketched by Havel: to live in harmony with what we ourselves are not and with those who are other than ourselves. One thinks first of Francis's extraordinary sense of solidarity and companionship with the natural order, with all of God's good creation, "a paradise in which every creature is brother and sister to us, a 'Thou' deserving love and respect."<sup>22</sup> More important, perhaps, is his ability to place himself imaginatively in the world of other human beings and to treat them with profound respect, gentleness and courtesy. He moved among the highest and lowest with the same ease and humanity. His legendary encounter with the sultan, a dialogue in which Francis not only gave but received, is a memorable instance of Francis's self-transcendence.

## Conclusions

We come to the end of exploring the intellectual resonances between one of the truly thoughtful men of our own time and one of the truly holy men of all time. David Tracy of the University of Chicago notes that while Havel is decidedly a modern man, "he sees with great clarity that we need to recover the premodern understanding of the link between the soul and the cosmos or the whole."<sup>23</sup> Some critics contend that Havel, even as president, does not have enough appreciation of the importance of institutions as bearers and transmitters of values. The validity of this view is difficult to judge, but Havel may see his own future already played out in the fate of Francis, who withdrew in frustration from active leadership of the Order. Nor did Francis live long enough to see the clericalization and bureaucratization of his community nor its splits over the interpretation of the very ideals which gave it birth.

We are faced with unanswered questions. Can the similarities, as well as the differences, between Francis and Havel shed any light on the difficult and increasingly contentious tension between citizenship and discipleship? Havel is clearly a citizen with religious and ecumenical sensibilities; Francis was a disciple whose religious vision had a deep influence on civic life. Can their shared vision help us at all to overcome what Paul Ricoeur has called the differences between the "pedagogy of power (citizenship) and the pedagogy of nonviolence (discipleship)?" What does citizenship add to discipleship and vice versa? How are the needs of flesh and blood human beings to be met by those who are citizens and disciples? It remains a singularly important question for our nation as a whole and for all who

seek to educate for citizenship men and women many of whom are also disciples.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> My sources for Havel are the following: "The Power of the Powerless" and "Politics and Conscience" in *Selected Writings 1965-1990*, ed. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); *Summer Meditations*, trans. Paul Wilson (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); and a speech given on the occasion of the Liberty Medal Ceremony, Philadelphia, July 4, 1994 (MSS).

<sup>2</sup> "Power of the Powerless" 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Summer Meditations* 62.

<sup>4</sup> "Politics and Conscience" 251.

<sup>5</sup> "Politics and Conscience" 251.

<sup>6</sup> "Power of the Powerless" 65.

<sup>7</sup> "Power of the Powerless" 79.

<sup>8</sup> "Power of the Powerless" 92.

<sup>9</sup> "Address" 7.

<sup>10</sup> "Address" 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> "Power of the Powerless" 80.

<sup>12</sup> Lazaro Iriarte, OFM Cap., "The Friar Minor as Penitent and Prophet," *Greyfriars Review* 1:2 (Jan., 1988):18.

<sup>13</sup> Cel 191,193.

<sup>14</sup> Iriarte 19.

<sup>15</sup> Iriarte 23.

<sup>16</sup> C.H. Lawrence, *The Friars: The Impact of the Early Mendicant Movement on Western Society* (New York: Longman, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence 228.

<sup>18</sup> Stanislaus Da Campagnola, OFM Cap., "Francis of Assisi and the Social Problems of His Time," *Greyfriars Review* 1:2 (Jan., 1988): 135

<sup>19</sup> Da Campagnola 135

<sup>20</sup> Da Campagnola 135.

<sup>21</sup> Da Campagnola 139.

<sup>22</sup> Marie Dennis et al., *Saint Francis and the Foolishness of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> As quoted in *Newsweek* (July 18, 1994): 66.

## Book Review

Pouring over religious book publishers' catalogs of new and forthcoming titles, one could hardly say that the interest in spirituality has crested or waned. With this surfeit of offerings it is difficult to glean the wheat from the chaff, and then devote some time to the few selections for personal reading and study. One area of the vast topic of spirituality which continues to inspire research and attracts the reader's attention is medieval spirituality. Within this sub-field, the Franciscan movement still elicits interest in its founder, St. Francis of Assisi, and the personalities of St. Clare of Assisi, St. Anthony of Padua, and St. Bonaventure.

In *Franciscan Spirituality: Following Saint Francis Today*, the Anglican Franciscan Friar, Brother Ramon, introduces readers to Francis of Assisi, the movement which grew up around him and its spirituality. He suggests how contemporary men and women might make application to their own situations. The author anchors his reflections in a distillation from the Franciscan sources contained in the *Omnibus* and primarily, though not exclusively, from British Franciscanist writers.

Each of the book's eighteen chapters averages twelve to fifteen pages of text and follows a roughly chronological order of Francis's life. The first part of the chapter describes a segment of Francis's life and then segues into an application for contemporary living. The chapter concludes with a prayer that summarizes the topic which was just presented. The central question which undergirds Brother Ramon's considerations "... is whether what happened in Palestine in the story of Jesus, and what was lived out in the story of Francis in Italy is possible ... where we are—where I am."

For those well versed in Franciscan lore and contemporary spirituality, there is no new ground broken in this book. Its value would be for people who want to know more about Francis of Assisi and Franciscan spirituality and for those who wish a return to the sources of their attraction to Franciscan living. I would recommend this book for initiates in Franciscan life and for any Franciscan library. Perhaps the best chapter for me was the one on the Third Order, which offers common sense guidelines about formulating a rule of life for this way of Franciscan living.

Since it is a British publication, it might not be readily available in the United States. It can be ordered from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK) / 7 Castle Street / Reading, England RG1 7SB / Fax: 01734 599240.

Anthony LoGalbo, OFM

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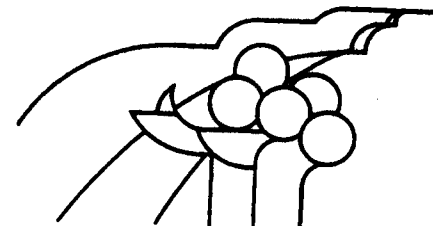
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