

Fraternity, Brother, Sister, Companion, New Creation

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Introduction

In this study we will treat the content and the value of fraternity, as a human as well as a spiritual value, particularly emphasizing the content and value of Franciscan fraternity.

At a spiritual level, Franciscan fraternity is a message offered to the world which witnesses to God's fatherhood along with the universal brotherhood of all people.

The content and value of this message is founded essentially in the experience of Gospel living, realized one day by Saint Francis with his first companions, revived today by brothers in the name of Christ, as a sign of hope, through a gift of peace and of universal brotherhood with all God's children.

1. Content and Value of Human and Christian Fraternity

Treating of fraternity's reality and possibility, we need to present the content and value of natural brotherhood along with the content and value of spiritual brotherhood, created among Christians.

A) Human Fraternity

On the human level, the concept of fraternity is related to the concept of consanguinity. By birth, from the same father and mother, men and women are brothers and sisters to one another similar to the animal world. This is purely a matter of brotherhood and sisterhood at a general level: this generic

concept arises from the importance of fatherhood, and of motherhood from which it proceeds.¹

Brothers and sisters do not choose one another but they accept each other. However, friends either accept or reject each other. The concept of brother and sister are counterpointed by the notion of "stranger:" strangers are not in communion through blood or through nationality. Solidarity through blood is a solidarity of life and death.

B) *Christian Fraternity*

Men and women are restored to one another as brothers and sisters when they are restored to God-as-Father.² No one can say that he loves God, whom he does not see, if he does not love the human person whom he sees (1 Jn 4, 19). The love of one human person for another is a measure and a verification of the love of humankind for God: the validity of all Christian horizontalism is anchored to the verticality of the cross. If one is not continually confronted with the death and resurrection of Christ, that person unfailingly becomes exploitative. Only God saves humankind (Ger 17, 5). God considers all that is done to the smallest of human beings as done to himself (cf. Mt. 25, 35-46).

The love of one human person for another becomes an act of worship toward God: whoever loves his own brother or sister has fulfilled the law. Christian fraternity is a revelation of the loving communion within the Unity and the Trinity of God:³ it is the revelation of the love which is at the origin of all fatherhood in heaven and on earth. The love of communion within God is the revelation of the love of communion with humankind: God is honored by humankind and humankind is honored by God. Christian brotherhood is both the acceptance of God-as-Father and the acceptance of men and women as

¹Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 17: "*Prima societas in ipso coniugio est, proxima in filiis; deinde una domus, communia omnia. Id autem est principium urbis et quasi seminarium reipublicae.*" [The first society is in that marriage, the next is in their children; then there is one home, everything shared by each one that is the foundation of a city and the nursery of a republic.]

²Lucretius, *De divinis institutionibus*, Lib. 4, chap. 10: Pl 6, 666: "*Primum officium iustitiae est coniungi cum Deo, secundum cum homine. Sed illum primum religio dicitur: hoc secundum misericordia, vel humanitas nominatur.*" [The first obligation of justice is to be one with God; the second is to be one with man. But the first is called religion; the second, mercifulness or humanity.]

³B. Cantuariense, *Tractatus de vita coenobitica seu communi*: Pl 204, 555: "*Sicut Unigenitus Filius Dei cum Deo Patre in unitate Spiritus Sancti vivit, unus est enim Spiritus Patri cum Filio, sic et nos tanquam filii adoptionis sub Deo Patre in unitate spiritus vivimus.*" [Just as the only-begotten Son of God lives with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit (for the Spirit is one with the Father by the Son), so too we live, insofar as we are sons of adoption under God the Father, in the unity of the Spirit.]

brothers and sisters; it is the witness that the disciples of Christ are reborn to new life in communion with Christ.⁴

2. Content and Value of Franciscan Fraternity

After speaking of fraternity at the human and Christian level, we can ask if there is also a place for discourse on Franciscan fraternity, agreed upon as a value in itself, in relationship to human and Christian fraternity. A discourse in this sense is not only possible but it is also necessary, though it is a matter of new content in an absolute sense; it is a matter of a "witness" offered to the Church and to the world that Christian fraternity is translatable into a concrete task for every baptized person. This "witness" establishes the natural space in the Franciscan fraternity, which assumes its own content from what Saint Francis did and said in his "measuring himself" to Christ and the Gospel.

Franciscan fraternity is essentially a witness offered to the world of the universal fatherhood of God along with the universal brotherhood and sisterhood of all people.

Moved by God to rebuild the Church, Saint Francis accepted the responsibility of constructing the Kingdom to its full potential. As the Word of God became human in order to restore the gift of divine life to everyone, so Saint Francis made himself a brother to all to restore creation to the love of the fatherhood of God and the joy of fraternity. It is obvious from his conformity to the life of Christ that Saint Francis's evangelical experience presents itself as "a rule of life" and as a "proposal" of evangelical observance. In reality, it does not matter that it is a new rule of life. More importantly, it is a rule of renewed life founded on the Gospel⁵ (cf. JdV 32).

A) Witness of the universal fatherhood of God

During his entire life, Saint Francis did not have any other preoccupation than to adhere to God with all his heart. He asked everyone, the simple as well as the wise, the perfect as well as the imperfect, to strive to achieve the way of truth and to always reach higher for this destination. Saint Francis's love of God became his loving reception of God's fatherhood, the Son's brotherhood, and of the Spirit's communion. He responded to the love of God, one and triune, with a song of love. Thus he became a voice for all creation.

⁴Saint Basil, *Constitutiones monasticae*, chap 18, *Ad canonicos in coenobio versantes*, 2: PG 13, 3182: "Omnia communia et seipsum communem praebuit apostolis." [He (Christ) held that all things should be in common, as he held himself common to all the Apostles.]

⁵Saint Bonaventure, *Expositio Regulae O.F.M.*, vol. VIII, 393.

The omnipotent, the most high, the most holy and supreme God, Father holy and just, Lord and King of heaven and of earth, merits thanksgiving, because, through his holy will, through his unique Son in the Holy Spirit, he created all spiritual and corporal things, creating Adam in his image and likeness and placing him in Paradise. Adam could neither desire nor want anything other than his Creator and Redeemer and Savior who is 'the fullness of good, the totality of good, the completeness of good, true and highest good, who alone is good, merciful and meek, sweet and mild, who alone is holy, just, true and right, who alone is kind, innocent and pure, from which and through which and in which is all pardon, all grace, all glory of all the penitents and of all the justified, of all the saints who rejoice together in heaven' (RegNB XXIII).

From the first moment of his conversion, Saint Francis accepted God's fatherhood. His reply to God became the deeply-felt renunciation of affection for his father Pietro di Bernardone: "Up to now I called you my father on earth; from now on I can say with all certainty: 'Our Father, who art in heaven,' because I place all my treasure in him along with all my faith and hope" (LM II,4).

Saint Francis was fully aware that it was God who took the entire initiative in his life. He wanted his life to be solely and simply a "rendering of grace" to the goodness and munificence of God: it was the Lord who called him to begin to do penance... it was the Lord who led him to the lepers... it was the Lord who gave him such faith in churches... it was the Lord who gave him such faith in priests... it was the Lord who gave him brothers... it was the Lord who revealed to him to live according to the form of the holy Gospel... it was the Lord who revealed to him the peace greeting (cf. Test).

Saint Francis feared that he might place himself as a barrier between his brothers and God the Father. He wanted his brothers to call themselves "friars minor," that is "lesser brothers" in the grand family of God the Father. The friars minor are brothers among themselves before all because they are sons of the Father who is in heaven (Mt. 23, 8). Francis wanted to be considered by his brothers only as their "servant" and he wanted those brothers who held responsible positions to be considered servants.

Friars minor must consider themselves the smallest brothers of the great family of God the Father, submitting themselves to everyone and to all creation out of love for the Father in true humility and charity, becoming living rocks in the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cel 38).

For love of the heavenly Father, the brothers must also love those children who are sinners.

Saint Francis always insisted that his brothers not judge anyone and that they not despise those who live luxuriously and dress richly for God is the Lord of all and has the power to call sinners to Himself, rendering them just.

He prescribed that his brothers also respect those who lived in sin: "as brothers and masters, brothers because they receive life from the same Creator; masters because they help good people to do penance assisting in their material necessities.... Many who seem to belong to the devil can one day become disciples of Christ" (L3S 58).

For Saint Francis, all of Christ's disciples must live in "true obedience," observing the Lord's commandments which are expressed in the Gospel and in their form of life (RegNB V): "The Lord offers Himself for them as for sons." They went through the whole world, witnessing to the Lord's voice through word and work, letting everyone know that only God is omnipotent (EpOrd 5).

Those who are sent throughout the whole world to witness to the voice of God, whose very being and doing must become "preaching" (*all my brothers must preach through their works*), must not glorify themselves, neither rejoicing among themselves nor exalting themselves for the good words or good works which God says or does (RegNB XVII), but they must attribute to the most high and supreme Lord God every good and they must acknowledge that all good things are His. The same most high and supreme and only true God must have "all honor and adoration, all praise and all blessing, all thanksgiving and all glory, because all good is His and He alone is good" (RegNB XVII).

Saint Francis found himself immersed in God, who is love, as a son, a brother, a spouse. He allowed himself to be swept away by this marvelous experience. With his capacity to hear and to respond to the expectations of God, he involved in this experience all those men and women who allowed themselves to be lured by the example of his life and the charm of his words.

He promised to always care for Clare and her sisters because, through divine inspiration, they followed his example of poverty. They were daughters and handmaids of the most high supreme God, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel (RCI VI).

The love of God, one and triune, is the faithful refuge for all those who are converted and do penance, renouncing worldly wisdom and prudence and subjecting themselves to every human creature for the love of God. All those who do penance, if they persevere to the end, will have in themselves the Spirit of the Lord and will be sons and daughters of the heavenly Father, whose works they do: they are spouses, brothers, and mothers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The converted are spouses of Jesus Christ when they adhere to Him with all their heart mediating the grace of the Holy Spirit; they are brothers of Jesus Christ when they do the will of the Father who is in heaven; and they are mothers of Jesus Christ when they carry Him in their hearts and bodies with

love and a pure and sincere conscience, and they generate Him through holy works, which shine forth to others by example. "Oh, how glorious, holy and grand to have such a Father in heaven! Oh, how holy and beautiful and loveable to have such a Spouse in heaven! Oh, how holy, how dear, pleasing and humble, peaceful and sweet and lovable and above every desirable thing to have such a brother who offered his life for his sheep" (2EpFid 9).

Since God suffered so much for humankind and he rewarded them with such gifts and continues to reward them for the future: "Every creature who is in heaven and on earth and in the sea and in the profundity of the abyss, render praise, glory and honor and blessing to God... He who alone is good, who alone is most high, who alone is omnipotent and admirable, glorious and holy, worthy of praise and blessing for all ages" (2EpFid 10).

B) Witness of Universal Fraternity of All People

From the absolute primacy of God the Father, whose loving fatherhood is the origin of all created things, Saint Francis broadened his mind and his heart to the dimension of a universal fraternity which centered in Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father, His image and His perfect "expression." Saint Francis desired to share the humility and poverty of Christ's Incarnation, so that following his teaching and his example (RegNB I:4), his life would become a canticle of praise and glory for the Father. He desired to be enraptured in Christ's love so that he would die from it just as Christ died out of love (Abs).

In this Christocentric vision, the love for the Son of God and the Son of Man is at the base of the universal fraternity of all things: Francis's brotherhood with all creation sustains this project in a canticle of praise and love of the most holy and omnipotent God. All things reveal the significance of the fatherhood of God. Francis's attention centered on who carries the image and likeness of God. Saint Bonaventure affirmed that it is no marvel that the charity of Christ rendered Saint Francis more intensely a brother to those who carry in themselves the image of the Creator and are redeemed from the blood of the Redeemer, because the piety of his heart made him a brother to all creatures (LM IX 4).

Francis wanted his brothers to love one another because that is what the Lord wanted: "this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 2, 18; RegNB I 1).

C) Fraternity as the expression of charity

To have a brother or a sister is a gift from God. With this gift, God expresses his love and his care for humankind. The gift of the first brother whom God gave to Saint Francis brought him extraordinary joy: "it seemed to

him that the Lord cared for him by giving him a needed companion and faithful friend" (1 Cel 24).

Francis loved his brothers without measure, with all the affection of his heart because he shared the same faith in the merciful love of God with them as well as the same vocation and mission. He loved them "as a household of one special faith united in the participation of an eternal inheritance" (2 Cel 172).

Offenses against the fraternity are offenses against the fatherhood of God, who immensely loves all his sons and daughters. When help did not come during times of necessity or when he experienced rude and loosely spoken words, Saint Francis took refuge in prayer so that, after his encounter with the heavenly Father of all, he no longer recalled the received discourtesies (LP 106; SP 46).

D) Fraternity as the expression of obedience

Those who are the God's sons and daughters are brothers and sisters to one another, and they are his children if they obey his precepts. They live in true obedience as the Lord's blessed ones when they observe his commandments which they promised to observe when they promised to observe the holy Gospel as their form of life (RegNB V). The brothers must not only not do anything evil to others, but they must also possess the spirit of charity that requires them to serve and obey one another voluntarily, reciprocally: this is the true and holy obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ (RegNB V). He lost his own life through obedience to his Father (EpOrd 6). In this charitable obedience the brothers had to place themselves at the service of others "in the obedience of charity, in the love of the brotherhood" (1 Pt 1, 22). Those in the brotherhood who have offices of responsibility must preside over others more through virtue and holiness of life than through office, so that the others will be provoked by their example and so obey more out of love than out of fear (RCl 4). For this fraternal obedience, Saint Francis was himself disposed to obey even the youngest novice, as if he were his guardian. If Francis had asked him for it, the Lord would have been able to make it so that in all the world there would not be any prelate that would be more feared by his subjects than Francis. Through the grace of the Most High, however, he preferred to subject himself to everyone, as if he were the least of all the brothers in the Order (LP 106; SP 46).

E) Fraternity as the expression of poverty

The poor are forced to collaborate with others to solve their problems, while those who are wealthy create walls of protection around their riches: poverty unites, wealth divides and marginalizes. Attached to wealth, the rich

do not have enough affection for their brothers and sisters. They do not give of themselves but impose themselves, offering their riches not to help their needy brothers and sisters but to control them. Fraternity is a gift that accepts and offers itself in the poverty of all the children of God, because he who is not poor and humble is incapable of self-offering. A stranger and pilgrim in this world, the poor person trustingly sits at the "table of the Lord," dining at the table of Divine Providence as a result of the work of poor people. The children of God find themselves at "the table of the Lord" to give and to receive affection and bread.

Saint Francis wanted to express the fraternity and poverty of all God's children around their Heavenly Father, when, as a guest of Cardinal Hugolino, he took the bread which he had received while begging and "distributed some to each of the horsemen and the chaplains of the bishops, as a gift from the Lord God. All received it with great devotion" (LP 61; SP 23). At the table of the Lord the brothers who could help their brothers in need. The brothers created fraternity and communion when they helped others thus enriching their own poverty. In them there was only one heart and one spirit (Acts 4, 32). The children of God recognized one another in the breaking of the bread.

F) Fraternity as an expression of chastity

With profound respect for blood bonds, Franciscan fraternity gives witness to the family that is generated from God (Gn 1, 13). Even the human family is sacred, because life is regenerated in family and all life comes from God. Fully alive human beings are the glory of God.⁶ Every person who is born realizes himself in the projection of a future time, where there is neither spouse nor marriage (Mt 22, 30). God's children will live their exultation when they have ascended into the house of the Father of all tribes, languages, people and nations (Rev 5, 9). This future is already in act and the "saints" have already intoned the canticle of those who will be regenerated upon the earth (Rev 5, 10). Those who renounce their own fatherhood here on earth to be associated with the fatherhood of the God Who loves all things wait for the fulfillment of this future, alert and vigilant on the frontier of eternity.

Fraternal bonds are not less solid than blood bonds. Saint Francis firmly believed in the solidarity of a spiritual fraternity. He did not hesitate to encourage the friars to trust one another in their necessity, putting forth the image of the confidence a son has in his mother: "And wherever the brothers

⁶Saint Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 4, 20, 7: PG 7, 1037.

are together or meet one another, they should show themselves as familiars. And each one should confidently manifest his necessity to the others, because, if a mother nurtures and loves her carnal son, with how much more affection should one love and nurture his spiritual brother?" (RegB VI).

So that the fraternity of the Poor Clares be an obvious witness of the purity of their hearts, Saint Clare exhorted the mother abbess to guard herself against particular friendships, so that it would not happen that she loved one more than another, causing scandal to all (RCI IV).

G) Fraternity as an expression of life

Brothers and sisters do not choose one another. Rather they accept one another. So there is no true fraternity if one is not allowed to enter into the lives of one's brothers and sisters. Neither is there fraternity if one is not open to allow others into his or her life. Without this communion of life, the fraternity would remain only an uninteresting indication of a geneological alliance. The Franciscan fraternity is a witness of love that comes from God and that gathers itself in God: That all may be one. This communion, already actualized among God's children, is fully realized in the future.⁷

Saint Francis most realistically placed the task of communion in the lives of his brothers on an immediately intuited evangelical base: "They should carry themselves as the Lord says: All that you desire that others do to you, you do it to them; and again: that which you do not want to be done to you, do not do it to others" (RegNB IV).

To safeguard their communion of life, the brothers should guard against all pride, vainglory, envy, avarice, of cares and preoccupations of this world, of distraction and of backbiting (RegB X). Saint Clare also enjoined that her sisters guard "against discord and division" (RCI X), instructing them to live together in "holy unity" (RCI Prol.) They must hold everything in common and maintain "the unity of mutual charity and peace." All the responsibilities for the monastic offices must be elected through the common consent of all the sisters (RCI IV).

Celano refers to the life of the first sisters with infinite admiration: "Above everything else, the virtue of a continual and mutual charity dominated their lives. It so profoundly united their wills that, though they were forty or fifty in

⁷ Saint Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmis* 105, 34: PL 37, 1415: "*Gloriosissima quippe illa civitas adeptam promissam haereditatem in qua nullus morietur, nullus orietur, non habebit cives qui singuli gaudeant suis rebus, quia Deus erit omnia in omnibus.*" [Since it will have obtained the promised inheritance in which no one dies or is born, the most glorious city will not have citizens who each rejoice over their own affairs; for God will be all things to each one of them.]

one fraternal place, the desire to want and not want the same things made for only one spirit" (1 Cel 19).

Speaking of the love that the first brothers had for one another, Celano observed that they were united among themselves as living rocks which, cemented by charity, constructed the temple of the Lord. Each time that they met in some place or on the street, as could happen, it was a true explosion of spiritual affection, that alone which is above all other affections the fount of true fraternal charity (1 Cel 38).

H) Fraternity as an expression of loyalty

Even prior to moral duty, loyalty and mutual respect are consequences of a fraternal relationship, whether created by blood or spiritual bonds. One does not really love if he is not loyal: loyalty is the expression of respect and respect is the expression of consideration and esteem. God Himself, who loves humankind, respects their liberty and treats them as equal, not imposing the return of love but teaching only that love is encounter and respect.

Saint Francis is fully cognizant of the fact that loyalty and respect are necessary aspects of love. He wanted his brothers, even when they went about the world, not to judge nor to argue with anyone. Rather they must be peaceful and modest, meek and humble, speaking honestly with all, as is fit (RegB II, III). Human beings must accept responsibility for their own actions always and everywhere, with loyalty and respect. "Blessed is the servant who knows how to love and to fear even his absent brother as if he were present, and does not say behind his back anything that he would not say to his face in charity" (Adm XXV).

This respect and understanding for humankind must never decrease, even when someone is mistaken. The brothers must guard against getting angry and perturbed over the sins of their confreres, because anger and consternation impede charity in themselves and in others (RegB VII). The brothers who know the sins of their confrere must not make him blush, reproaching him with his sin, but must show great mercy toward him, because it is the unhealthy, not the healthy, who need a doctor.

Among all vices, Saint Francis particularly abhorred detraction. One day, when he heard a brother denigrating the good name of another, he turned to his Vicar Peter Cattaneo with these words: "If there is no remedy for detractors, great damage will befall the Order. Quickly the sweetest odor of the many will be changed into a disgusting stench if the mouths of the stinking are not closed. Courage, move, diligently examine! If you find an accused brother innocent, punish the accuser with severe castigation as an example..." He said: "I desire that this be done by you and your ministers with the greatest diligence so that this disease would not spread further" (2 Cel 182). With

complete understanding toward brothers who make mistakes, Saint Francis was well aware that the spiritual fraternity had its own need for charity and even for justice.

1) Fraternity as an expression of ecological respect

Since all created things possess God's "significance," Francis's soul reflected itself in them as in a luminous spirit. Thus he approached all creation with the heart of an infant, establishing a rapport of sympathy and agreement, which he expressed in a canticle of joy. For Saint Francis, all things are the "words" of a canticle of joy, which is a prelude to the liberation from corruption of sin and from death. Since all creation proclaims the glory of God, Saint Francis wanted to sing of the love of the Most High, Omnipotent, Good Lord with and through all his creatures: "Praise, My Lord, with all your creatures" (CantSol).

For Saint Francis all creation testified to God's love. He was well aware that his own survival was dependent on all other creatures. He accepted this sacrifice with gratitude and thankfulness. He did not feel that he was "the king of the universe," but rather a poor brother who needed other creatures in order to live. He was not a "matador." Rather he approached all creation with respect and courtesy.

Today we comprehend certain prophetic gestures of Saint Francis better, for we assist in the tragedy of an ecological breakdown that was unknown by the people of his time. It is not a "Franciscan fable" that Francis wanted to snatch from death those small lambs that were being carried by their owner to the market to be sold, "bound, bleating and dangling" from his shoulders (1 Cel 79). Rather this gesture expressed a precise message: humankind is directed to make use of but not to abuse created things, much less to subject them to themselves in order to satisfy their own desire to dominate and possess, distorting the look of the Creator of heaven and earth in them.

3. The Dynamism and Structure of Franciscan Fraternity

To become "brother" of all created things, Saint Francis testified to the fraternity of all God's children. This fraternity of witness became the emblem of his family that he wanted to call the Order of Friars Minor (the smallest brothers). The dynamism and structural component of this "fraternity" qualifies the scope that he proposed and the role that he assigned to offices that provide order and establish the common good.

A) Nature and Purpose of Franciscan Fraternity

The Franciscan Fraternity qualifies as an apostolic and itinerant fraternity on account of the missionary call of Saint Francis, mandated by the Crucified of San Damiano, to restore the Lord's house which had fallen into ruins.

Called to be with Christ through the mandate to preach (Mt. 3, 14), Saint Francis realized the mission which the Crucified of San Damiano entrusted to him when, at the Portiuncula, he heard the Gospel passage which sent the Apostles to preach the Good News to the whole world: "Go, preach that the Reign of God is near and do not carry anything with you" (Mt. 10, 7-10).

Having profoundly understood the sense of that commission, Saint Francis exclaimed: "This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I long to do with all my heart" (1 Cel 22). Desiring to be faithful to the invitation of the Crucified, Saint Francis would not have been able to decide differently because the Church is constructed and restored only through the preaching of the Gospel, through the announcement of the word and the example of one's life.

Through the example of Saint Francis, all Franciscans are sent into the world to carry the divine gift of peace and salvation, announcing the Gospel by word and example. The Church, which receives and authenticates every gift of grace which her Lord sends her, entrusted to the Franciscan Fraternity the duty to preach conversion to the Gospel (*metanoia* — penance) by word and example. She gave them the duty (*mandatum*) to preach penance (1 Cel 33; L3S 49; Anp 36; JdV 3, 6; LM III, 10).

Based on the example of the fraternity of Christ with His apostles, Franciscan Fraternity contributes a worshipping atmosphere (*Deum colere*) to the world, which unites and energizes it.

The brothers are united together in the love of Christ (Mt. 18, 20). They responded to the invitation to be with Christ through their eminently ecclesial religious profession, which is first and foremost their belonging to the Franciscan Fraternity. With their religious profession, the brothers have contracted a pact with Christ to conform to his chaste, poor and obedient life by totally consecrating themselves to the worship and service of God (1 Tim 5, 11).

Consecrated to God, Franciscans want to live their consecration after the example of Saint Francis, whose life was a continually renewed conversion (*facere poentiam*) and a proposal of conversion, continually renewed for others (*predicare poentiam*).

For the brothers to remain together, they must first of all agree to mutually help one another to realize their spiritual personality, in worshipful celebration and offering the world a service of salvation through the announcement

of peace. The nature and purpose of the Franciscan Fraternity can only be understood in the context of the story of salvation. Sociological and cultural values must be gathered in this project, without permitting any distortions.

B) Role and Responsibility of offices of governance

Constituting a unique fraternity, the Order of Friars Minor must not be divided into many autonomous splinter groups but must have a centralized governance. So it establishes an organization for its ecclesial service of evangelization, demanded of it by the Church. The responsibility of the Order and of the common well-being of the fraternity is mandated to the superior and to Chapters on local, provincial and general levels.

1) The Role of the Superior

The role of the superior is a role of service. A superior is not selected for his own advantage but to be useful to others. Often the office of superior is assigned irresponsibly as a compensation for human, hidden frustrations. In such cases, obviously, the office of superior becomes sacrilegiously exploited and tampered with.

The office of superior must never provide easy access to revenue for a group that has attained status, for this would only provide for continual and comfortable compromises. Saint Francis, who knew people very well, admonished his brothers not to demand the office of superior and to give up the accepted responsibility when it is taken back.

The authority and service that superiors possess does not come to them from their subjects granting them the social authority to govern, nor does it come to them by virtue of the vow of obedience (dominative power). Rather, as with all authority in the Church, it is a matter of power from Christ. Superiors, then, participate in mediating the ministry of the Church. In the Church, authority and obedience usually comes from God.

Participating in the pastoral authority received from Christ, the superior has the office to teach, sanctify, and govern his subjects.⁸ The superior must exercise this authority according to the norms of the constitutive law within his or her own religious family (The Rule). Religious live their vow of obedience subject to their community's laws, whose superiors are the interpreters in its actual practice. In submission to the common norms of the Rule, the superior is the one who must lead his fraternity without ever separating himself from it. Christ conferred on Peter a primacy of service, after which

⁸*Mutuae Relationes*, 13, a), b), c).

Peter offered Him a primacy of love: he who is not able to love is not able to serve. This primacy of love is not improvised with the addition of office and duty.

Having many things in common, religious superiors differ according to the religious family to which they belong and over which they preside. Given the nature and purpose of its fraternity, a Franciscan superior must have some specific requisites which are different from the requisites for a superior of another religious family.

Saint Francis qualified the superior of his community as minister, servant, and guardian. A superior, then, is someone who helps his brothers to spiritually realize the fulfillment of their vocation-mission. And the superior must guide him faithfully. In the exercise of his ministry, the ministers and guardians must be useful to their brothers as servants toward their masters (RegB X).

Saint Francis wanted his superiors to be servants who truly served. Those who were no longer capable of service, but who needed to be served, should be replaced. This is valid for the Minister General as the ultimate guardian of the whole fraternity (RegB VIII). Saint Francis himself, no longer capable of caring for the brothers due to his illness, renounced the governance of the Fraternity (2 Cel 143).

Saint Francis knew very well that dynamic superiors, equal to the task and accustomed to discomforts, were needed to care for an evangelizing fraternity open to the world such as his. *Abba* is always *Abba* (Father), even when he is old and incapacitated, but the Franciscan minister is minister only as long as he ministers. The brothers must obey their ministers in everything that is not contrary to their conscience and the Rule (RegB X). The superiors must be the guardians of the observance of the Rule in its reality and possibility. To avoid the observance of the Rule with the pretense of appealing to the phantom "spirit of Saint Francis" would suggest having found an accommodation for one's infidelity, it is merely a smokescreen.

Superiors demonstrate their love for Saint Francis and the brothers entrusted to their care by continually examining their faithful observance of the Rule. There should not be any brother in the world who sinned as much as he could, who, after looking into his minister's eyes, would not be turned away without his pardon, if he asked for it; and if he does not ask for pardon, the minister should ask him if he wanted to be pardoned. And if this sinful brother would come before a minister a thousand times, the minister must love him more than Saint Francis himself, so that he might be able to win him for the Lord (EpMin). Since they must render an account to the Lord for each of the brothers, the superiors must remain their ultimate refuge, the first who takes away desparation (RCI IV).

2. *Role of the Chapter*

The Chapter is a general, provincial or local meeting of the Fraternity to verify fidelity to the ideal of the life professed and to program the service of salvation which it offers to the world. The Chapter is a moment to verify the observance of the Rule on the part of the Fraternity. This meeting is called a Chapter because the ancient monks, who held a Chapter each day, daily examined their observance of the Rule, reviewing the precepts chapter by chapter.

In the Franciscan Fraternity the Chapter must treat of the things which concern God (RegNB XVIII) and of the things which concern the Fraternity. In this circumstance, the brothers who are subjects must also consider reasonably and diligently the actions of their ministers and servants (RegB V). However, in the Franciscan Fraternity the Chapter is above all a moment of joy and communion. Jacques de Vitry wrote that the brothers in his time came together "once a year in the same place to cheer one another up in the Lord and to eat together, gaining noteworthy benefits from these meetings" (JdV 1).

According to his testimony, the brothers always took advantage of experts on the occasion of the Chapter. They then formulated and promulgated holy rules which they forwarded to the Pope for his approval. After that, they separated for the whole year, dispersing through Lombardy, Tuscany, Puglia, and Sicily (cf. JdV 1). Like the apostles, whom the Lord invited to rest after the tasks of evangelization and to exchange among themselves the experiences of the apostolate (Mk 6, 31), the brothers joyfully came together at the Chapter, talking of the things of God and the concerns of their life.

This encounter of the Fraternity was particularly dear to Saint Francis, who, notwithstanding the itinerant life of the brothers, always desired to maintain a bond of unity among them, in such a way that "they lived in accord in the womb of an only mother, attracted by the same spirit and generated from the same father" (2 Cel 191). The Chapter was a good occasion for meeting and knowing the brothers, the oldest were able to blend in with the youngest, the learned were able to bond with the simple, and all the brothers, even those absent, were able to feel the unity of love (2 Cel 191).

The Fraternity increased remarkably shortly after its beginning so it was no longer possible to respect the prescribed design for the celebration of the Chapter. Nor was it possible for all the brothers to participate (RegNB XVIII; RegB VIII).

The Chapter, as an assembly of the Fraternity, was divided into general, provincial and local meetings. These divisions, although necessary, must not skew the nature of the Franciscan Chapter for us. It is always general in that

all the brothers must participate directly or indirectly, even at the level of the local fraternity.

In the Franciscan fraternity, the Chapter is the second pole of communion; the Eucharist is the first, for it is there that the brothers meet together and receive communion with Christ. In the Chapter the brothers meet together and receive communion among themselves in Christ.⁹ In this capitular communion, all are equal, and no one imposes anything on anyone, but each one offers and receives enlightening insights from experience as well as encouragement and love.

Particular directives, on a par with commands, arise from the particular personality of the gathered brothers. These directives treat of the things that once again look to God and his holy operations in the fraternity with their responsibility as human beings, Christians, religious and Franciscans. As human beings, they are in a position of self-determination in everything that is good and holy; as Christians, they are in a position to carry out priestly, prophetic and royal actions, that is, they can sanctify, teach and govern; as religious, they are in a position to fulfill their pact of irreversible and unreserved friendship with Christ; as Franciscans, they are in a position to decide on their Gospel conversion and ecclesial service to preach this Gospel conversion to all through word and example.

The capitular decisions are properly acts of the Church, in whom Christ, through the sacrament of the Order, confers the social power to sanctify, teach and govern. As such these decisions become the pastoral plans of the Church. Through their worshipping attitude and evangelical purpose, the Franciscan fraternity is, and truly appears to be, a witness offered to the world that Christ has come among humankind to save his brothers and sisters whom the Father has given to him.

Conclusion

In its content and value of witnessing to the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of all people, the dynamism of Franciscan Fraternity essentially and complementarily has three fundamental components: liturgical, apostolic, and communal.

⁹B. Cantuariense, *Tractatus cit.*, PL 204, 547: "*In praestandis autem beneficiis id semper agit charitas, ut qui ametur. Semper enim, ut praedictum est, amat amari, nec amanti sufficit amor communionis, si non adsit communitio amoris.*" [In bestowing advantages, moreover, charity always acts so that someone may be loved. For, as was said previously, charity loves to be loved; nor is it enough that the lover enjoy the love of communion without also having the communion of love.]

The Franciscan Fraternity is before all else a worshipping fraternity because it consists of brothers and sisters who, through a pact of love (profession), are consecrated to the worship of God and, for the love of God, to the service of humankind. The chaste, poor and obedient lives of these brothers and sisters is essentially an expression of worship which recognizes and proclaims the primacy of the fatherhood of God over all creation.

The Franciscan Fraternity is an apostolic fraternity because it is God's desire and the Church's design to announce salvation to all: "Go forth and preach the Gospel" (*facere et praedicare poenitentiam*). Those who believe will be saved.

The Franciscan Fraternity is a communal fraternity of people who believe the Gospel. They mutually accept one another as brothers and sisters because they hold dear the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. They observe the Rule as a "code of communication" so that they have within themselves the same sentiments of Saint Francis.