

**A Practical Theology of Conversion:  
Renewing the Third Order Franciscan Charism**

**By: Patricia Doody, M.Div.**

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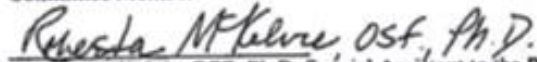
Approved:



Dr. Mary Carter-Waren, D. Min., Associate Professor, St. Thomas University  
Committee Chair



Dr. Theodore James Whapham, Ph.D., Dean and Associate Professor, Ann and Joe  
Neuhoff School of Ministry, University of Dallas  
Committee Member



Roberta McKelvie, OSF, Ph.D., Special Assistant to the President for Mission, Alvernia  
University  
Committee Member

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation articulates a practical theology of the Franciscan Third Order charism of conversion for future generations. Recognizing the demographic shifts that are occurring in women's religious communities and the implications these shifts have on the life of their religious charisms in general and the Franciscan Third Order charism in particular, these chapters engage historical theology, spiritual theology, theologies of conversion and theology of contemporary religious life in the United States using the methodology of the pastoral circle and the hermeneutic lens of normativity of the future. The text incorporates the historical development of this charism in the life of Francis; the charism's historical expression in Bonaventure's *Soul's Journey into God*; its renewal in post Vatican II Franciscan women's congregations; its expansion in initial formation of novices and its relevance to post modernity. This study then offers pastoral suggestions for animating the charism as a resource for gospel living in post modernity.

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the memory of my Franciscan sister and teacher Mary  
Elsbernd, OSF, S.T.D., who inspired this journey in her words, work and life and to all  
those who will bring the Franciscan Third Order charism into the future.



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## **Introduction**

This dissertation is a practical theological study of the Third Order Franciscan charism of ongoing conversion. The following work investigates how the conversion of Francis, the theology of conversion, Bonaventure's *Soul's Journey into God*, and the experience of conversion in initial formation can provide a basis for renewing the charism for those struggling to be faithful in the midst of considerable deconstruction in post modernity. The study is important because the women's congregations who have primarily articulated and manifested the treasure of the charism in their mission and ministry are experiencing a decrease in population. However, just because the demographic is shrinking does not mean that the energy for living the charism will also shrink. The charism is not solely dependent on the religious institutions that have been the significant avenue for sharing it with the world. Rather, the Third Order charism is a gift of the Holy Spirit given for the sake of the reign of God and thus has a life of its own. Those who share the charism in religious life have a responsibility to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in opening new pathways for the charism to continue to influence the world in the future.

At a time of fast pace progress that has improved quality of life, post modernity has also resulted in broken systems, poverty and violence. In such a context, the Franciscan charism of conversion offers a way of living the gospel that creates community and solidarity. In other words, the present study is significant because this charism has the potential to bring hope and healing to people of the world suffering from poverty, ecological crisis, and violence. The Franciscan charism and its accompanying

values can animate people of faith to rebuild and transform church and society. It has the potential to draw those who embrace the charism to care for the poor, the earth, and to work for peace, non-violence and justice. Thus, this work will explore the dynamics of conversion in several arenas. It will survey several theologies of conversion including Bernard Lonergan and Donald Gelpi. Francis' own conversion and the expression of the conversion in Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey into God* speak to the core understanding of Franciscan conversion. The current understanding of Franciscan formation as an experience of conversion will be examined in light of the post Vatican II shifts in religious life and changing demographics, particularly drawing from the work of Sandra Schneiders. All of these exist within the wider backdrop of post modern issues that bring struggle and suffering to the lives of many. In bringing these elements into conversation, the goal is to suggest ways to appropriate the charism for the future. Thus, this practical theological study asserts that the Franciscan charism of conversion, which has been largely transmitted by Franciscan Third Order communities, remains relevant in post modern times and must be handed on to the wider Christian community as a grace that grounds faithful gospel living.

In order to move the charism beyond formal religious life, the following chapters place women's religious life, novitiate formation, the dynamics of conversion in general, Franciscan conversion in particular and Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey into God* into dialogue with one another. The practical theological method of Joe Holland and Peter Henriot's pastoral circle in *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* is the methodology for this work. The pastoral circle moves through four instances of reflection: insertion, social analysis, theological reflection, and pastoral planning. The circle is particularly

appropriate because it allows for incorporation of human experience and engagement in interdisciplinary dialogue in order to move toward a faith praxis that, with grace, opens the people of God to conversion. For the purposes of this text, the pastoral circle brings Franciscan tradition, historical and sociological aspects of current experience of religious life, psycho-spiritual dimensions of Franciscan formation and the spiritual dynamic of conversion to be in mutually critical dialogue. The result will be pastoral suggestions for animating the charism of Franciscan conversion for the church and the world.

This straightforward practical theological method will be nuanced with a particular hermeneutical slant. The lens for the pastoral circle is the hermeneutic approach of Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd's normativity of the future. Their articulation of this approach began in Biblical theology with the question of how sinful, patriarchal texts could be considered inspired or the Word of God. In their search for answers, Bieringer and Elsbernd noticed that Biblical scholarship had focused largely on the past or present with little attention the text's relationship to the future. Drawing from the hermeneutics of Gadamer, Riccour, and Schneiders, they looked for ways that the texts expressed God's hope for the future. They began to ask how inspired texts could speak to the eschatological future. What began as an approach to scripture then moved to other texts such as ancient texts, Ecclesial documents, and even to human experience as a living text. Using the lens of normativity of the future requires awareness of several dimensions of a given text including attention to a future vision, the presence of



inclusivity or exclusivity of the text, the ethics present in the text, and pneumatological perspectives such as Spirit, grace, and hope.<sup>1</sup>

In the chapters of this dissertation, each moment on the pastoral circle is seen through the lens of normativity of the future. Human experience in the moment of insertion points to encounter with God in the present to shape the future. This approach acknowledges that the locus of encounter with God, theologizing, is focused toward an eschatological future for the people of God as a communal endeavor.<sup>2</sup> Social analysis through this lens expands the understanding of experience in the present to suggest direction for the future. Here the ethical considerations of the fragmentation, oppression and injustice in post modernity suggest God's longing for justice and wholeness hoped for in the future.

In theological reflection on Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey into God*, the lens of normativity of the future is particularly significant. Bonaventure's text could be relegated to the past as among many medieval texts that are not relevant to the present or the future faith lives of the people of God. However, with normativity of the future as a lens, retrieval of this early text is important in understanding the concept of Franciscan conversion and the profound relevance of the charism of conversion in the past, present and future. The text dialogues with contemporary experience so that it may address the signs of the times, be a resource for the formation of the faithful and contribute to the further development of God's dream for the world. For the theological reflection on conversion, the most important dimension of this approach is pneumatological. The Holy

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Henriot and Joe Holland, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983). 7-9.

<sup>2</sup> Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, *Normativity of the Future* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010). 11.

Spirit is the source of hope and grace which makes transformation/conversion possible in the future.<sup>3</sup> This will be a complement to the prominence of the role of the Trinity in *The Soul's Journey into God*. As well, normativity of the future is inclusive of the entire community, especially the marginalized and oppressed.<sup>4</sup> Franciscan conversion is directed toward walking with the poor in the Spirit of God and in the footprints of Jesus. Francis' own conversion took place among the poor at the margins, a conversion that has attracted and inspired many to live the gospel in a like manner through eight centuries. This lens helps us see Francis' vision in the present, supporting a realistic analysis of the current expression of the charism as well as becoming an impetus for animating the Franciscan tradition in the future.

The first moment of the pastoral circle, insertion, articulates the current experiences of individuals or communities. This moment is the beginning of reflection on human experience itself, the living text of the Christian community, as it endeavors to be faithful. Insertion is the inquiry of what is going on now.<sup>5</sup> The first chapter will describe both the background and the current realities of Franciscan spirituality, religious life, and charism as it is understood in religious life. The issue to be addressed as a result of the current experience is how the Franciscan charism of conversion will live on and bring the presence of gospel values in the world even as the demographics of Third Order Regular congregations are shifting significantly. The current experience of conversion within the contemporary initial formation process of Franciscan women along with the spiritual theology found in Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey into God* will give direction for

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>5</sup> Henriot and Holland, *Social Analysis*, 8.

animating the charism in post modernity for future generations. This chapter offers the foundational background of current experience.

The second instance on the pastoral circle is social analysis, a locus for interdisciplinary dialogue with social sciences. Social analysis looks at the wider context in which experiences are occurring. Holland and Henriot see social analysis as an aspect of discernment, particularly communal discernment.<sup>6</sup> It further fleshes out current context for human experience. Social analysis offers that the aspects of any given question or issue are interrelated and contribute to the whole of a situation.<sup>7</sup> Chapter Two will engage an historical and social analysis of the experience of religious congregations in relationship to a world that is built on a global capitalist system that has brought forth fragmentation and brokenness. Such an atmosphere of suffering is in need of ongoing conversion. This chapter poses the question: What is the place (God's call) of women religious in the midst of the deconstruction of post modernity? Factors such as the role of women in society, the growing cultural diversity within religious life, and the hunger for spiritual meaning in post modern realities will be explored. In other words, this chapter addresses why human experience is as it is. This discussion supports the position that ongoing conversion is the foundational impetus for the yearning for God's dream of inclusiveness, justice, and peace. In other words, the Third Order Franciscan congregations are stewards of a charism that has potential to prophetically transform the injustice and chaos of our post modern context.

The third task of the pastoral circle is theological reflection in which faith and Church tradition become sources for understanding and transformation of human

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 11.

experience, addressing the question of where and how God is present in the experience. Chapters Three and Four turn to theological reflection. Chapter Three focuses on the theology of conversion, how conversion is experienced in initial formation and the value that Franciscan conversion has for the wider Christian community in the postmodern world. Bernard Lonergan, James Fowler, Donald Gelpi and David Couturier will be the conversation partners for reflection on conversion. Lonergan's theology of conversion and Fowler's developmental stages of faith, as well as Gelpi's understanding of conversion in adult faith formation gleaned from the RCIA process informs the experience of initial formation in Franciscan religious life and therefore the experience of conversion in the initial formation experience. Couturier will add a contemporary Franciscan view of conversion to the conversation.

Chapter Four will discern the dynamics of Franciscan conversion in *The Soul's Journey into God* in dialogue with the Zachary Hayes, Ilia Delio and others who have unpacked the works of Bonaventure. The theological reflection on Bonaventure's text will discern and articulate a vision of conversion marked by the dynamic and grace filled movement of the Holy Spirit as a guide for a hopeful future. Also, because this is a medieval text written in a medieval cultural context, the patriarchal language of the text must be acknowledged, though not at the expense of dismissing the text and its retrieval.

Finally, the fourth instance is pastoral planning, the response that the experience calls for in light of social analysis and theological reflection. This leads to action, the "what do we do" with the present experience.<sup>8</sup> Chapter Five will offer a practical theological integration of the theology of conversion, conversion in novitiate formation,

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.

and conversion within *Soul's Journey into God* and then suggests pastoral considerations and practices to animate the Third Order Franciscan charism of conversion for the future. To do so, the chapter will look at the model of the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, Iowa. This congregation has moved through the renewal mandated by the Vatican II council, has retrieved and claimed the core charism of conversion, and is now employing new ways of bringing the charism to the wider Christian community. In the ministry of a Charism Team, this congregation is finding diverse way to spread the charism through members, associates, volunteer programs, vocation ministry and ecological initiatives. In doing so, they are making efforts to bring gospel values to the margins and to those who are called to the margins. This is the “practical” aspect of the charism, and it is meant to bring Franciscan life into a new era.

## **Chapter One: Foundations of Franciscan Conversion**

### **Introduction**

The starting point on the pastoral circle is an insertion into human experience. The first experience to note is that of Francis and the legacy of his way of life throughout history. For more than 800 years, Franciscan spirituality has influenced women and men both in the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian denominations. The Franciscan charism has been lived out distinctively in every branch of the Franciscan family, and particularly for this text, the Third Order Regular religious congregations of women. In the first thirty or so years following Vatican Council II, these Franciscan women retrieved and renewed the third order charism of conversion in keeping with the directives of the Council. The renewal moved religious life into a period of significant transition in which communities were both energized by their charisms and at the same time experienced fewer women entering religious life. As Franciscan women navigate the changes in current religious life, the stewardship of the third order charism of conversion is also in transition. This transition offers a new opportunity. Franciscan life is a treasure that transformed the life of the Church in Francis' time as it provided the faithful with an alternative way of living the gospel in contrast to the excesses of the clergy. Francis' spirituality satisfied the hunger for authentic faith. Today, the Franciscan charism of conversion has potential to be transformative beyond institutional religious life into the future for a post modern world that is again in great need of conversion.

Francis made a journey of gradual conversion through encounters with Christ and the poor. Today, an analogous experience of Franciscan conversion has the potential to

emerge in the initial formation process of Franciscan women. Over a period of six to eight years, a woman who enters a congregation discerns her call to religious life in deepening steps. The tools for this process of gradual conversion and incorporation of new members include spiritual, theological, psychological, communal, and academic work, as well as ministry experiences among the poor and suffering. The central formative stage for the new member is the novitiate year in which she immerses herself in the spirit of the community for which she is discerning. In the past 20 years until the present, Franciscan novitiate formation in the United States takes place in a common novitiate in which novices in the U.S. from 21 Franciscan women's congregations come together to live community, study vowed life, and integrate the third order Franciscan charism of ongoing conversion into their spirituality. Ultimately, the goal of this formation is to integrate the charism in the life of a woman discerning her vocational call so that it is integral to her identity. She experiences gradual internal conversion and embraces conversion as a way of life. If she is able to internalize the charism, then she is more able to live out the charism in response to the signs of the times in the Church and world.

Known as the “second founder of the order and the chief architect of its spirituality,”<sup>9</sup> Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, living in the generation after Francis' death, knew the struggle of nurturing the Franciscan charism. He became the Superior General of the Franciscan order amidst controversy complicated by the Papacy. Bonaventure stepped into leadership of the Order when it numbered over 30,000 members and the

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<sup>9</sup> Ewert Cousins, introduction to *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1978), 1.

Note: “Order” means more than the Friars Minor for the purpose of this dissertation.

membership was divided over how to live the charism. Some wanted to adhere to strict observance of Francis' rule. Others wanted to adapt to the needs of the times, which seemed to be contradictory to Francis.<sup>10</sup> Bonaventure had to engage both factions to retain unity and the energy of Francis' way of following in the footsteps of Christ. Eventually, he wrote what was to be the definitive biography of Francis, which would help define the brothers' lifestyle. An academic, his role as leader led him to write theology that developed the simple spirituality of Francis into an expanded theological form.<sup>11</sup>

In the years since Vatican II, the development of the initial formation process in religious life and the increase in Franciscan scholarship have enriched understanding of the gospel life in the Franciscan tradition. Bonaventure's approach was to return to the source, Francis himself, in order to bring Franciscan gospel values to his own chaotic context.<sup>12</sup> The gospel was Francis' hermeneutic lens. In turn, Francis was Bonaventure's hermeneutic lens. This is evident in his classic work, *The Soul's Journey into God*, in which Francis' influence on Bonaventure's spiritual theology is apparent.<sup>13</sup> For this reason, *The Soul's Journey into God*, along with current understanding of Franciscan formation will be the sources for animating the Franciscan charism of conversion as a foundation for Franciscan gospel living for present and future generations of women and men.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>11</sup> Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, ed. *Such is the Power of Love: Saint Francis As Seen by Bonaventure* (New York: New City Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999). 17.



Therefore, this chapter will provide foundational information and concepts for the present study. The chapter will look at the changes in religious life that ensued from Vatican Council II and the consequences of those changes for the articulation of charism and the formation of new members. It will also provide the backgrounds of Francis, Bonaventure and *The Soul's Journey into God* as anchors for the charism of conversion. In light of conversion as a charism, the chapter will begin to unpack a definition of conversion as well as an understanding of conversion in the Franciscan Third Order Rule. This is the beginning point for renewing the Franciscan charism of conversion for the future.

### **Religious Life in Transition: An Overview**

The authors of *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life* offer a broad view of the historical evolution of religious life. They identify a cycle of change that has repeated itself throughout history as religious life has moved from one era to another. Moving through a cycle of growth, decline, transition to a new image and then beginning again with growth, religious life has evolved through this cycle evident in the historical eras that include the Desert mothers and fathers (200-500), Monasticism (500-1200), Mendicants (1200-1500), Apostolic Orders (1500-1800), and Teaching (and nursing) congregations(1800-present).<sup>14</sup> Today religious life is once again in a period of transition. Many of the congregations that built the Catholic education and health care systems in the most recent era of religious life are living out their charisms in response to pressing needs beyond the institutions that they created. Members of religious congregations

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<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Cada et al., *Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life* (Whitinsville, Mass.: Affirmation Books, 1979). 12-13.

minister in areas of peace and nonviolence, care of creation, social justice, and address the needs of the underserved and most vulnerable.

The roots of this change from ministering within Church structures to reaching out beyond institutional ministries emerged in response to Vatican Council II. Women religious in the United States took Vatican II very seriously. Congregations turned inward to examine all aspects of the religious lifestyle in light of *Perfectae Caritatis*, the Vatican II document on renewal of religious congregations. Particularly, they examined their life under the horarium (strict daily routine) and began to make changes that allowed for updating as a way of being more relational with the contemporary culture. Sisters moved from a very confining habit (uniform) to a modified habit and finally to simple “lay” clothing. The horarium was loosened to provide more personal freedom. Sisters began to drive cars, manage their own limited allowance of money, and enjoy freedom of coming and going from the convent. This shift in the internal culture of religious life led to members developing a more direct relationship with secular culture than previously experienced, and even more significantly, members grew psychologically as adult women. They were no longer separated from the secular world but rather became participants in society more fully.

As women religious were addressing the internal life of their congregations, they were simultaneously becoming more involved in society. The intent was that updating religious life would allow religious to influence secular life with gospel values, but secular life also influenced religious life. This renewal of religious life took place at a time of change in U.S. society. Civil rights, the sexual revolution, and conflict in Viet Nam created a climate of change and desire for freedom. The women’s movement

impacted women religious as it led to opportunities for advanced education and diverse ministry opportunities. As career opportunities for women in general moved beyond teaching, nursing, and marriage, the numbers of young women choosing to enter religious communities was decreasing. Women no longer had to join a religious congregation in order to minister in the Catholic Church. Religious life experienced not only a decrease in numbers of new members but also a mass departure of vowed members.<sup>15</sup>

Those who remained became invisible in Church and in society. No longer easily identified by distinct clothing, women religious looked and behaved more like the secular world on the outside and became essentially invisible to the general public.<sup>16</sup>

Congregational members often chose not to identify themselves as “sister” outside of their ministry setting. This was an effort to become more approachable and more equal with the people of God. The result was that their lifestyle appeared no different from the lifestyle of secular single life. Having more career options and greater autonomy, fewer women saw such a lifestyle as an attractive way of living. Women could do in the secular world whatever a sister did as a member of her congregation. Non-vowed lay women moved into their rightful place as ministers in the Church. The Church and the world no longer needed nor relied upon women religious as the primary labor force for education and health care.

A number of other cultural factors impacted new vocations. Birth control and smaller families influenced numbers in religious congregations. Families’ sizes declined leaving fewer young adults to discern religious vocations. Parents with fewer children to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>16</sup> Sean D. Sammon, FMS, "Last Call for Religious Life," *Human Development* 20, no. 12-27 (1999): 12.

carry on family lineage were reluctant to encourage religious vocations. Materialism and individualism also shaped attitudes about religious life. Young people were not attracted to a lifestyle so counter to the culture in which they were immersed. Certainly in recent years, the priest sexual abuse scandal and the inadequate response of those in authority in the Church have also had a negative impact on religious vocations.<sup>17</sup>

Those who did stay or enter religious life navigated a complex journey of internal renewal and external shifts in their lifestyle. In this cultural environment, women religious grew intellectually and matured psychologically. Before Vatican II and feminism, sisters experienced themselves as passively obedient within a hierarchical structure. They entered congregations immediately after high school or moved directly from convent high schools into their congregations. The structure of convent life was similar to home life with parents as authority. In community, superior elders were in authority and the majority of the sisters obeyed them. After Vatican II, sisters slowly made the transition from child-like obedience to mature adults. Instead of being assigned ministry, sisters discerned choices for ministry based on personal gifts and talents in keeping with the mission and charism of the congregation. Collaborative governing structures replaced autocratic modes of decision making. Constitutions were revised to reflect institutes' adaptations and renewal efforts. Congregations began to study the spiritual heritage of their founders and foundresses. They integrated the unique spiritualities rooted in the histories of these founding women and men. Out of the study and retrieval of these histories, the articulation of charism emerged as a defining

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 13.

characteristic, a family trait, within which the members of communities found their identity and their inspiration for living gospel lives.

By the 1980's, communities began to recognize that the introspection and self-understanding of the immediate years after Vatican II had run its course. Questions turned to how communities lived their relationship with the ecclesial authority and the secular world into which they had acculturated. As women religious began to minister among the poor and disenfranchised, the signs of the times in the suffering of those with whom they worked and lived became more evident and pressing. They began to focus congregational resources on the injustices that created such suffering. They were fulfilling the call of Vatican II to renew and minister out of this renewal, living the gospel as *Perfectae Caritatis* had urged. Congregational mission statements and chapter promulgations were and are rooted in the founding charisms.

### **Charism and Religious Life**

The purpose of the years of renewal was to update a way of life that in recent history had changed very little, even though the world in which sisters served had changed dramatically. They were encouraged to reclaim and reflect on the gospel values present in their founding charisms in order to build relationships that would bring these values to a modern world, especially addressing the “signs of the times.” Charism is a theological idea in scripture and is the work of the Holy Spirit. However, Vatican II introduced the notion of charism as a theological concept applied to Religious Life for the first time, asking congregations to return to the charism of their founders.<sup>18</sup> *Perfectae Caritatis* encouraged congregations to “return to the sources of Christian life in general

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<sup>18</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure*, vol.1 (New York, Paulist Press, 2000), 284.

and to the primitive inspiration of the institutes, and their adaptation to the changed conditions of our time.”<sup>19</sup> Congregations studied primary sources related to their founding; rewritten constitutions led to newer and deeper understandings of charism. Just what does “charism” mean? The root comes from the Greek word, “charisma.” The most basic definition is “free gift or favor,” and in religious language it means “free gift of grace... a supernatural gift bestowed by the Holy Spirit for building up the body of Christ.”<sup>20</sup> Women religious were called to articulate and manifest their particular spiritual gifts for the sake of the people of God.

Sandra Schneiders has written a comprehensive theology of women’s religious life in which she examines the current understanding of charism in religious life. She describes charism in Religious Life at four levels. First, religious life in itself is a gift to the Church. Divine in origin, not created either by the institutional Church or by the members of any given order, religious life has gifted the Church throughout history in its many forms from monastic to mendicant.<sup>21</sup> Second, every religious congregation shares a basic form of life in which members are called to give themselves to Christ in consecrated celibacy for the sake of the Reign of God. This expression of charism unites all women religious in a common way of life that gifts the Church.<sup>22</sup> Third, each particular order has a unique charism that emerges from its founding and from the deep story, myths and symbols of its history. For congregations founded by a bishop, by several founders, or formed because of a (no longer needed) ministry in its history, the

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<sup>19</sup> “Perfectae Caritatis” in *The Basic Sixteen Documents: Vatican Council II*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 386.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane, eds. *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 180.

<sup>21</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *Finding the Treasure*, 285.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 285-286.

charism may be difficult to define. For others, founded by distinct personalities such as Francis and Clare, the charism is more easily described.<sup>23</sup> Schneiders' final point is that the charism lives not only in the community as a whole, but simultaneously in the individual members. Charism is about vocational identity in which the individual recognizes the congregational charism within herself. In turn, she adds her unique expression of the charism to the whole community. Through the Holy Spirit, she is transformed as she lives her vocation, and her congregation is also transformed because of her membership.<sup>24</sup>

Schneiders then turns to the prophetic character of charism within religious life. When congregations were founded, founders and foundresses responded to their contemporary needs. Members were compelled out of faith to address the suffering of their brothers and sisters. As new needs emerge in new times, ministries address those needs. Yet, the prophetic charism of religious life as a whole and of individual charisms of particular congregations continues to be the guiding motivation for members.<sup>25</sup> Thus, as congregations responded to the call for renewal, the prophetic character of religious life emerged.

This prophetic dimension is integral to the concept of charism. Schneiders asserts that all religious congregations share this aspect of charism, though it is expressed uniquely out of the founding charism of each congregation. How is this prophetic dimension of charism defined? Prophetic religious life is rooted in the prophets of the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 288-289.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 314.

Hebrew Scriptures and lived out in the commitment to Jesus and his prophetic praxis.<sup>26</sup>

At the core of prophetic religious life is the mandate to love God and neighbor as distinct yet inseparable. To love God is to love one's neighbor and to love one's neighbor is to love God. One does not simply result from the other, but are expressions of one and the same love rooted in God. Prophetic religious life, then, means that members relate to many parts of society, church and culture as did the Hebrew prophets. In the prophetic tradition, the biblical prophets mediate conversation among God, the people, and their leaders and do so from the margins.

This prophetic dimension is uniquely expressed in canonical vows. The vows, usually three, place members in the prophetic location of the margins. Ideally, with no commitments to particular persons (celibacy), with lesser attachment to the economic and power systems of society (poverty), and with a commitment to intimacy with God in prayer and solidarity in community (obedience), women religious live in a liminal space: neither completely in nor out of society's structures and endeavor to move in the spaces where God, those on the margins, and culture meet.<sup>27</sup> For Franciscans, Francis set the example of living the gospel in this liminal space.

### **Francis of Assisi**

The Franciscan charism emerged from the life of one simple man who never set out to create a community much less a charism. Nevertheless, his life has become the narrative from which the charism has grown. Francis of Assisi (b.1181) experienced profound and gradual conversion as a young man. He was born during the time of a faltering feudal system and a rising merchant class, a world marked by complex politics

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 323-325.



that intertwined church and state and wars between the small city-states. Pietro Bernadone, his father, was a successful textile merchant who made frequent business trips to France. Francis would have been expected to join in the family business. Until his conversion Francis lived, in contemporary terms, as a playboy or “party animal” and enjoyed life by spending extravagantly.<sup>28</sup> As a soldier during a time of war between Assisi and Perugia, he was imprisoned and became sick.<sup>29</sup> As will be seen in chapter four, this was the beginning of his conversion.

While Francis was repairing run down church buildings, the institutional Church was experiencing its own problems, a sort of falling apart. The Church of Francis’s time had grown into an entity of great economic affluence, outwardly obvious in the use of golden chalices and silk vestments. The materialism of the church appeared to be contradictory to the values of Jesus that lay people understood and wanted to embrace. Thus, lay people critically questioned the motivations of those who were leading them and searched for a more authentic spirituality.<sup>30</sup> This search led to popular heresies (notably Cathars and Waldensians) that spread throughout Europe as Christians tried to reclaim the simple poverty that they understood as central to following Jesus. These heresies created multifaceted conflicts within the church and led to inquisitions. Even so, these movements were an effort to follow Jesus in a rigid life of poverty and a rejection of the materialism that was evident in the Church.<sup>31</sup> While Francis’ conversion was perhaps unique in that it was not deemed heresy, it was certainly in keeping with a

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<sup>28</sup> Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, trans. Helen Moak (New York: Crossroad, 1992). 100.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>30</sup> F. Donald Logan, *The History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2002). 202.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 202-212.

particular response to the Church's materialistic values and the search for a more authentic spirituality than the Church appeared to be offering at the time.

The conversion of Francis led to a renewed way of living a Christian life that first became a movement. This movement stands out for several reasons. Unlike the major heretical movements of his time, Francis' conversion led him to simply live in the footprints of Jesus, to live the gospel. In the midst of the excesses of the church and society, he chose a gospel life on the margins of society but with loyalty to the institutional Church. The heretical movements of the time appeared to protest certain beliefs of the Church. Rather than protest, Francis's complete focus on the gospel kept him within the boundaries of the Church. As the order grew in number and as St. Clare joined the movement, Francis' conversion led to a way of following the gospel that became an attractive model for a Christian life of poverty and simplicity.

### **Bonaventure of Bagnoregio**

Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (b.1221) was also born into this milieu, although forty years later than Francis. His life span barely overlapped with that of Francis (d.1226) and though they never met, Bonaventure (and apparently, his mother) did attribute cure of a serious illness in his childhood to Francis' intercession.<sup>32</sup> As he explains in *The Major Legend* and *The Minor Legend*, "while I was just a child and very seriously ill, my mother made a vow on my behalf to the blessed Father Francis. I was snatched from the very jaws of death and restored to the vigor of a healthy life."<sup>33</sup> Francis clearly had some influence on Bonaventure because he entered the Order of the Lesser

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<sup>32</sup> Armstrong, Hellmann, and Short, eds. *Such is the Power of Love: Saint Francis As Seen by Bonaventure*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

Brothers in 1243, likely in Paris where he was attending the University of Paris. As a successful student, he was influenced by Franciscan scholars, most notably Alexander of Hales.<sup>34</sup> Granted a license to teach in 1247, he became involved in a dispute with Thomas Aquinas about the “principles governing the Lesser Brothers and the Friars Preachers.” The reputation that he acquired in the dispute led Pope Alexander IV to encourage the Parisian masters to allow him to join their ranks. He was incorporated into the Parisian masters six months after he became General Minister of the order.<sup>35</sup>

Clearly a scholar, Bonaventure’s path took him away from formal academia when he was elected General Minister in 1257. He served as General Minister for sixteen years, inheriting the discord and division that led to the removal of the previous General Minister. The circumstances that led to his election were critical. With heresy causing sharp discord among the brothers, Pope Alexander IV asked Bonaventure’s predecessor, John of Parma, to resign as General Minister. The heresy was rooted in the question of how the brothers were to interpret and live the life that Francis had established. The Order’s membership had grown to 30,000 who were geographically scattered. Just four years after Francis’s death in 1226, these disputes emerged because Gregory IX wanted the ordained brothers to be a work force for implementing the reforms of the Fourth Lateran Council. They were to preach doctrine, work against heresy, and hear confessions. Some brothers wanted to adapt their life to the demands being made on them while others, in contrast, wanted to follow Francis’ Rule literally.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Francis had made his intent about the Order's lifestyle very clear in his *Testament*, "I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words saying: 'They should be understood in this way.' But as the Lord has given me to speak...may you understand them simply and without gloss."<sup>37</sup> However, some brothers wanted more flexibility in how they interpreted the Rule while others wanted to interpret it literally.<sup>38</sup> Not finding a resolution, the ministers went to Gregory IX who issued a decree in 1230, *Quo Elongati*, which "addressed two fundamental issues that exerted powerful influences on the life of the brothers: the authority of Francis's Testament, and the obligation to the gospel."<sup>39</sup> Gregory IX recognized the significance of the Testament written by Francis before his death, as the ideal vision that Francis left with his brothers. However, the Pope also recognized the primacy of the gospel in the life of the brothers and said that the brothers were bound only to the aspects of the gospel contained in the Rule. His reasoning was that the Rule was approved by the Church, and therefore existed as a Church document which the Church then had a right to interpret. The Pope's action, instead of solving the dispute, created more division and tension. The result was that, in the years that followed, the simplicity of Francis' lifestyle of gospel poverty became an organized and regulated life.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the conflicted interpretations continued for decades.

Bonaventure did not completely resolve the conflicts around the brothers' interpretation of Francis for their lives. What he did, though, was to create a body of

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<sup>37</sup> Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, William Short, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents: The Founder* (New York: New York City Press, 2001), 12.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

work that helped the community see Francis's vision and spirituality more clearly. He wrote the Major and Minor Legends of St. Francis which became a part of the liturgical life of the community, making the Franciscan vision more significant to them.<sup>41</sup> Other works, including *Soul's Journey into God*, also helped bring Francis and Franciscan spirituality to the fore. As expressed by the editors of *The Founder*, "Bonaventure identifies Francis's unique place. He does so with his ministry of guiding his brothers, that is, of aiding them in discovering the wonder of their Founder and his vision of the world, themselves, and the God who calls them."<sup>42</sup> Thus, while serving as Minister General, Bonaventure wrote about the conversion of Francis, which became one of the focal points for a renewal of the Order's life in the spirit of their Founder.

#### **Bonaventure: *The Soul's Journey into God***

After becoming Superior General in 1257, Bonaventure went to Mount La Verna in 1259 where Francis had received the stigmata. Just as Francis frequently entered into solitude, Bonaventure went there probably seeking peace amid the tensions that he was facing within the order. He contemplated Francis' life and experience on the mountain, perhaps hoping to clarify his own identity as a follower of Francis as well as to discern some direction for the Order.<sup>43</sup> His meditation on Francis' stigmata and the vision of the six-winged Seraph took shape in *The Soul's Journey into God*. In contemplating Francis' experience of the stigmata, Bonaventure has the insight that the journey to God is through

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Bonaventure, Bonaventure: *The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St. Francis* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1978)

“the burning love of the Crucified Christ.”<sup>44</sup> In a complex pattern of six stages, he describes a mystical journey that points to the lived experience of Francis on many levels. The text echoes Francis’ relationship with the God of overflowing goodness and evokes Francis’ love for God mirrored in the beauty of creation. Bonaventure presents a Christ centric spirituality pointing to Francis’ commitment to imitate Christ.<sup>45</sup>

The journey, then, is rooted in Christ and anchored by Francis’ own ongoing conversion as he followed in the footprints of Christ. Zachary Hayes cites Bonaventure’s birthplace, Bagnoregio, as symbolic of Bonaventure’s spiritual theology. Though in Bonaventure’s time, the topography was different, the current topography is a circumference with the town at the center. Using this image, the center is God and God goes outward to create in a circular movement. Eventually, all creation returns to God, through Christ.<sup>46</sup> In the six stages of the soul toward God, the one journeying grows in a relationship with God from the outside to the inside, deepening the relationship with God and self until one returns to God. Put simply, Bonaventure’s thought is circular in that “we come from God, we exist in relationship to God and we return to God.”<sup>47</sup> The result of making this circular journey, deepening the relationship with God, is a journey of conversion that is a core value to the entire Franciscan family.

### **Franciscan Family**

The overall structure of the Franciscan family bears noting. Franciscans are part of a large Franciscan family with many branches and subdivisions that are

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<sup>44</sup> Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure: An Introduction to his Life, Thought and Writings* (Hyde Park: New City Press, 2001), 25.

<sup>45</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings* (New York: The Crossroad), 33-34.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure*, 13.

offshoots of main branches. Simply stated, when Francis began to live the gospel, he attracted many male followers. These became the first order or Friars Minor. When Clare of Assisi wanted to follow the gospel in the same manner as Francis, she became the leader of the Second Order, the Poor Clares. In keeping with the role of women in her medieval world, Clare and the women of her community ministered from within the walls of their convent. Eventually, when lay people were attracted to gospel life as Francis lived it, but without giving up their lay lives completely, the Third Order began. The Third Order eventually became both regular and secular orders.<sup>48</sup> Since the renewal of Religious Life after Vatican II, Third Order Regular members have primarily been women, (though there are a few men), who live in community under canonical vows.

Each branch of the Franciscan family lives gospel values with a focus on poverty, but each branch has a primary charism that marks its unique expression of Franciscan life. The First Order is called to live radical poverty as modeled by Francis. The Second Order, the Poor Clares, lives the charism through contemplation. The Third Order Regular lives the charism through ongoing conversion.<sup>49</sup> In the past fifty years, with the benefit of a resurgence of Franciscan scholarship, women's communities of the Third Order Regular [TOR] have newly embraced the TOR Franciscan charism of ongoing conversion and the Franciscan values.

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<sup>48</sup> Ingrid J. Peterson, Armstrong, Regis J, ed. *The Franciscan Tradition* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), xix-xxii.

<sup>49</sup> Roberta McKelvie (Alvernia University) Personal Communication, August 2015.

## Conversion

Conversion has numerous definitions and perspectives. Rooted in the biblical word “metanoia,” meaning a complete change of heart, a turning away from sin toward serving God, the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures called for people to turn away from idolatry and turn toward faithfulness to God.<sup>50</sup> The *Concise Dictionary of Theology* defines conversion as “a turning from sinful priorities to God in a way that enhances both personal integrity and the good of the Christian community. Conversion is required by the coming of God’s kingdom.”<sup>51</sup> In the theological dictionary by Rahner and Vorgrimler, conversion is “any sort of moral transformation, especially the radical venture of entrusting oneself to God and [God’s] gracious guidance by a radical and fundamental religious act.” Rahner and Vorgrimler also note that conversion refers to the experience of one who embraces a new or different Christian belief.<sup>52</sup> At times, particularly in Protestant Christianity, conversion refers to a single moment or experience in which a person turns their life over to Jesus. However, taking a broader approach, Bernard Lonergan describes conversion as a radical transformation that leads to interconnected changes and developments. These changes are in relationship to self, others, and God. They are personal, intellectual, moral and social changes that shape values, behaviors and

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<sup>50</sup> Gerald O’Collins and Edward Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 157.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>52</sup> Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1965), 102.



relationships. Conversion brings an ontic shift that is a gradual maturing over a lifetime.<sup>53</sup>

Considering these understandings of conversion, what is the experience of Franciscan conversion? The Franciscan notion of conversion is a turning to God and being conformed to Christ. The experience of conversion is the work of God with the cooperation of the human person. Francis' conversion was not one instantaneous moment and so Franciscan conversion does not happen once and for all time, rather it is ongoing, deepening, and continuously defines a person's life. The Third Order Regular Rule describes conversion in three fluid moments. The first is to acknowledge God and Christ in all of the created world-humans, plants, animals, rocks, and the entire cosmos. The second is to adore God by living the gospel prayerfully, with one's whole life. The third is to serve God by such actions as walking with the poor, acting on behalf of justice, caring for the earth, and advocating for peace. If one continues to "follow in the footprints of Jesus" throughout one's life by acknowledging, adoring, and serving God, then ongoing conversion results.<sup>54</sup> Integration of this way of living religious life is the goal of Franciscan formation in Third Order women's congregations.

### **Formation**

Within Franciscan religious life, ongoing conversion is integral to the process of initial formation. Generally, faith formation in a broad sense is meant for all the baptized. Formation guides persons in their faith development as "a growth in living and

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<sup>53</sup>Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in New Context," in *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*, ed. Walter E. Conn (New York: Alba House, 1978), 12-13.

<sup>54</sup>*Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis and Commentary* (Typecraft Press, Inc., Franciscan Federation, 1982), 15-16.

understanding Christian faith that follows the stages of human maturation.”<sup>55</sup> In a parish context, the religious education of children or the initiation of adults in faith by way of the RCIA are examples of faith formation programs that engage the faith development of the participants. Parishes provide ongoing formation for parishioners through scripture studies, topical studies and social outreach. Presumably, formation is never completed in one’s life as conversion is ongoing. Continuous turning toward God also is never finished in one’s lifetime.

For those entering religious life, initial formation is the incorporation of new members into a distinctive charismatic way of living the gospel of the congregation. Crosby and Saffiotti describe recent historical and developmental initial formation of religious in three stages. The first is a vocational journey in that a person is learning to imitate Jesus. Prior to the changes precipitated by Vatican II, imitation was the goal of formation, entailing observable behaviors. Hence, members were initiated into the daily schedule including the wearing of a habit, prescribed silence, prayer, work and recreation. Members were to conform to clear norms of moral behavior. After Vatican II, conformity shifted to the imitation of Jesus and developing renewed understanding of Jesus in the gospels. The second stage is a journey of discipleship or following Jesus in relationship, highlighted by an affective relationship with Jesus. This may be seen in the years immediately following Vatican II in which the faithful were encouraged to enter into a personal relationship with Christ. The third stage is a process of increasing identification with the “mind and heart of Christ.” Crosby and Saffiotti describe this as the “intrapyschic-spiritual” dimension of formation. In this stage, the “mind and heart” of

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<sup>55</sup> O’Collins and Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, 87.

Jesus is internalized. The movement through these three stages is from the “external to the internal, from behavior to deep motivations...Effective formation is one in which Christ becomes the form of the personality of the person called, not only the norm she observes or the footsteps she follows.” Formation offers the opportunity for the one being formed to engage “inner transformation and gradually [to become] a new person as one, increasingly, “puts on the mind of Christ.”<sup>56</sup>

With the evolution of religious congregations in the decades after Vatican II, the initial formation of new members progressed beyond stage one. Prior to the renewal of religious life, women entered at a young age. Some attended high schools administered by congregations and entered immediately after graduation. Entrance classes were large and formation was partly crowd control of very young, high spirited women. Postulants were women in their first year of formation. They wore simple dress, usually alike, and participated in the daily tasks of the convent. They were received as novices at the end of postulant year, dressed in the habit, and trained in the horarium, the rigorous daily schedule followed by each member of the community. Days were regimented and life highly disciplined. Members learned to conform. Classes were primarily academic. After novitiate, sisters professed temporary vows and were called junior professed. They went to college to complete degrees for ministry that was assigned to them. Teaching sisters were with their own students during the school year, completing teaching degrees during the summer. Final commitment/profession of vows took place for the entire class at one time. Before final vows, each sister had an interview with a priest to ensure that she was choosing religious life freely, without duress.

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<sup>56</sup> Fr. Michael Crosby and Luisa Saffiotti, "Orientation to Formation" (content presented at the Orientation to Formation, Baltimore, MD, 2012), 5.

In the renewal of religious life after Vatican II, the initial formation of the past no longer fit the changes that continued to evolve. This was a time of confusion. No one knew what kind of religious life for which to prepare new members. In 1969, the Vatican gave religious congregations direction for providing updated initial formation to new members. The document provides general guidelines for novitiate and at the same time encouraged experimentation and flexibility in shaping new formation programs. In keeping with *Perfectae Caritatis*, it encouraged formation programs to prepare novices for the modern world. In *Instruction on the Renewal of Religious Formation*, #5:

As regards the formation to be imparted in the novitiate in Institutes dedicated to the work of the apostolate it is evident that greater attention should be paid to preparing the novices, in the very beginning and more directly, for the type of life or the activities which will be theirs in the future, and to teaching them how to realize in their lives in progressive stages that cohesive unity whereby contemplation and apostolic activity are closely linked together, a unity which is one of the most fundamental and primary values of these same societies.<sup>57</sup>

Consequently, the former model of formation was updated with the incorporation of current understandings of psychology, theology and spirituality. As entire communities gradually emerged from a lifestyle of conformity, initial formation could no longer be done as a project of teaching new members to conform. Rather than training young women as though they were children, formation became a

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<sup>57</sup> Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, "Renovationis Causam," (Rome: Vatican, 1969), #5.

more individualized attempt to meet the particular formational needs of each person. Contemporary psychology and renewed spirituality informed the formation process. Community living skills, theology, scripture, congregational history, constitutions, and integration of the congregation's charism became prominent in the formation of new members. New language replaced some of the former terminology for formational stages in many congregations. Postulants were called affiliates, inquirers, or associates. These are women who enter a congregation and live with the community for one to two years. Junior professed members were called temporary professed.

However, the term "novice" remained, and the novitiate experience, though much different, is still the heart of any formation process. A novice is one who is a "probationary member of a religious institute."<sup>58</sup> The designated residence for the novice is the novitiate, though the term also refers to the program that a novice follows. Novice formation is guided by Canon Law: Can. 646 states "The novitiate, through which life in an institute is begun, is arranged so that the novices better understand their divine vocation, and indeed one which is proper to the institute, experience the manner of living of the institute, and form their mind and heart in its spirit, and so that their intention and suitability are tested."<sup>59</sup> The canon is expressed in general terms. Each congregation may then determine the program that will assist the novice in discerning her vocation. Thus within the guidelines of canon law, the congregation focuses the formation of new

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<sup>58</sup> O'Collins and Farrugia, "A Concise Dictionary of Theology," 177.

<sup>59</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, accessed February 8, 2017, Vatican.va, 646.

members in ways that integrate the particularity of the congregation's charism, spirituality, ministry and common life.

Novitiate programs differ from one congregation to another. However, the core of the formation experience is the growing relationship that the novice engages as a follower of Christ through the congregation with whom she is discerning her call. In the midst of workshops and classes on religious life and the three canonical vows, she enters into spiritual direction on a monthly basis and takes extended times of prayer and reflection. The relationship with the novice director is significant. Novices meet one on one weekly with the director to engage in ongoing dialogue about the novice's spiritual development, psychological growth, and community living skills. The formation director accompanies the novice as she shifts from the culture of single life to the culture of religious life, continuously testing the question of whether religious life is a good fit, an honest call, a place where the novice can be her best self in service to the people of God as she lives the gospel. Formation provides an environment for ongoing conversion, and the novice director is the midwife of this process.

Internalizing the story of Francis' conversion as a predisposition for one's own conversion is core to the Franciscan novitiate experience. The symbols and stories of Francis become the focus of prayer and reflection for the novice and through it to recognize her own attraction to and resonance with the Franciscan tradition and its value for her life and future ministry. Relieved of ministry obligations except for minimal service experience, she has the time to discern the presence of the Franciscan charism within and her call to embody the charism as a vowed Franciscan. The goal of initial

formation in Franciscan women's congregations is to nurture the inner transformation that assists the novice in identifying herself as Franciscan, as one who follows in the footprints of Jesus, and in being able to live her life in a way that brings gospel values to her ministry and by extension to a world in great need of those values.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter represents the human experience insertion point on the pastoral circle as it describes experience on several levels. The experience of women religious in the post Vatican II renewal brought major transitions to a way of life that had until that time been stable and predictable. The shifts of the 1960's and 1970's have resulted in two particular consequences that pertain to the present study: the development of charism as a gift that directs mission and an overhaul of initial formation to meet the needs of an evolving religious life.

For Third Order Franciscans, the articulation of the charism as ongoing conversion and the instilling of that charism in new members reflect the dynamism and value of the charism. This value is especially evident in the prophetic gift of the charism, actively reflected in women religious moving to the margins to minister among the poor and underserved. Francis' own life of conversion is the central story for conversion. In following Christ, Francis went to the margins of society. Francis' life then became the raw data for Bonaventure in *The Soul's Journey into God*. He makes available a spiritual theology of the simple saint and articulates the human experience of gospel conversion through stages of the journey. This notion of Franciscan conversion is expressed in the Third Order Regular Rule. The document defines the charism of conversion in succinct terms: acknowledging, adoring, and serving God. In the experience of initial formation,

new members are provided with opportunities, resources and an environment for conversion. This offers a model for providing faith formation for a wider population to experience Franciscan conversion and to live the charism into the future.

The current chapter lays a foundation for moving the charism of conversion beyond the boundaries of Franciscan communities. Third Order Franciscan women have reclaimed and embraced the charism of conversion in their lives of community and ministry. The charism is already a treasure for those who experience these women as they build community and minister among the poor and oppressed. However, these congregations are experiencing profound shifts in population and resources. Yet the charism does not depend solely on the existence of these institutions. These institutions, with a smaller membership, can move into the future and continue to influence the Church and the world in new ways as they invite others to live a Franciscan way of life through ongoing conversion. The goal of the following chapters is to lay practical theological groundwork for this charism, to give new life to the Church and the world and to bring the transforming presence of the all good God of Francis and Bonaventure to the present and the future.



## **Chapter Two: The Social Context for the Charism of Conversion**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter provided background for the current experience of religious life in the wake of the Vatican II renewal. In the renewal, the concept of the Third Order Regular charism of conversion came to fruition as the impetus for mission and ministry on the margins. The changes within religious life and the deepened understanding of Franciscanism became a grounding resource for Third Order Regular religious. Chapter two will now examine the need for the charism in a contemporary context. The renewal of Vatican II has not taken place in a vacuum. Changes in U.S society and culture occurred at the same time as the Church and Religious life experienced transitions. As politics, economics and social customs shifted, the Church, again out of renewal, was called to address the signs of the times.

In many ways, Pope Francis sets the stage for the contemporary relationship between the church and the world in which it exists. One example is the address he gave to the United States Congress during his 2015 visit. In the midst of contemporary issues of post modernity, on September 24, 2015, he addressed the United States Congress with a call to conversion. He called for gospel values to guide decisions in the face of the fragmentation of war, violence, treatment of immigrants, overall human dignity, and economic disparity.<sup>60</sup> He articulated the struggles of the poor and the need for sustainability, “It goes without saying that part of this great effort (of addressing poverty) is the creation and distribution of wealth. The right use of natural resources, the proper

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<sup>60</sup> Francis, “Transcript: Pope Francis’s Speech to Congress,” September 24, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/transcript-pope-franciss-speech-to-congress/2015/09/24/6d7d7ac8-62bf-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/social-issues/transcript-pope-franciss-speech-to-congress/2015/09/24/6d7d7ac8-62bf-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679_story.html).

application of technology and the harnessing of the spirit of enterprise are essential elements of an economy which seeks to be modern, inclusive and sustainable.”<sup>61</sup> He called for dialogue and named greed as a core motivation fueling global violence, “Being at the service of dialogue and peace also means being truly determined to minimize and, in the long term, to end the many armed conflicts throughout our world. Here we have to ask ourselves: Why are deadly weapons being sold to those who plan to inflict untold suffering on individuals and society? Sadly, the answer, as we all know is simply for money: money that is drenched in blood, often innocent blood. In the face of this shameful and culpable silence, it is our duty to confront the problems and stop the arms trade.”<sup>62</sup> Characterized by globalization and unprecedented developments in technology, post modernity is the environment into which contemporary U.S. women religious, and all people of faith, are called to live the gospel. Though the benefits of technology and globalization enrich the world, news media provides constant evidence of the fragmentation, individualism, greed, and suffering that denigrates humanity and the earth itself. This is the post modern milieu in which contemporary women religious are discerning their gospel mission.

This chapter will provide a social analysis of post modern realities as a context for the development of Religious Life after Vatican II. It will survey the effects of capitalism as a system that brings about fragmentation, diminished human dignity, poverty and oppression. Also, as will be evident, changes in Religious Life were occurring simultaneously with and were affected by many contemporary changes. Therefore, the chapter will look at the transitions evident in contemporary religious life as a result of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

change in society. Generational influences, culture shifts and ecclesial issues have affected the contemporary experience of vowed religious. As most women religious understood and embraced their charisms, they chose ministries that addressed the needs of the post modern world. In the midst of this upheaval, Franciscan women (and indeed many religious) were drawn to the poor and oppressed. While it is important to note that many developments in post modernity have been helpful to people (information technology, communications, etc.), these times have also seen increase in suffering, powerlessness and poverty. Women religious, responding out of their charisms, moved to those margins where injustice has disenfranchised both people and the earth. The Franciscan Third Order charism of ongoing conversion has a particular value for our current reality. The following social analysis sets the context for which living the gospel through the charism of conversion is needed.

### **Post Modernity: Social and Spiritual Issues**

Post modernism is a complex yet broad philosophy that is a response to the modern period of the twentieth century. Though it looks similar to modernity in some ways, post modernity often poses a different attitude toward modernity's characteristics. For example, both articulate the fragmentation of society but modernity would see fragmentation as tragedy while post modernity sees it as positive.<sup>63</sup> In basic terms, postmodernism adheres to certain ideas: no absolute truth, fact and fiction are fluid, opinions take precedence over logic, authority both religious and moral are distorted, morals are personal, boundaries hinder human relationships, all religions are valid, ethics

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<sup>63</sup> "What is postmodernism? What are the Characteristics of Postmodern Literature?" accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.literary-articles.com/2013/08/what-is-postmodernism-what-are.html>.

are liberal.<sup>64</sup> From this general description, the following will describe contemporary issues that reflect experience in a post modern world.

The prevailing economics of capitalism, in all its complexity, is at the center of post modern life. Holland defines capitalism as the organization of society into a system of free market accumulation of capital wealth that is driven by economic self-interest.<sup>65</sup> Capitalism, not only local or national, has become a global way of life. Global capitalism, manifest in transnational corporations, is made possible by the technological revolution which facilitates rapid communication and transportation. Holland says, “Under the slogan of ‘globalization,’ this new stage is presently revolutionizing the entire planet...The electronic revolution...has made feasible intense and rapid networks of communication and transportation on a global scale. This in turn has made possible the emergence of gargantuan...multinational corporations, which are absorbing so much of the planetary economy and becoming the most powerful forces on Earth, not only economically but also culturally through their control of global media.”<sup>66</sup> The U.S. economy, though suffering periodic crises, was deemed successful over communism in the aftermath of the dissolution of the communist Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin wall. This success is characterized by productivity, a wide diversity of products and availability of human services. The abundance of product and service choices available in the U.S. offers a stark contrast to the scarcity of the same in developing countries.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “All About Philosophy,” accessed January 13, 2017, <http://www.allaboutphilosophy.org/characteristics-of-postmodernism-faq.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age 1740-1968*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 21-22.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), xii.

As Pope Francis stated and is quoted above, a significant consequence of capitalism is income inequality and wealth disparity. In the United States, income inequality is often cited as the difference in salary between CEOs and their workers. In June of 2015, Fortune magazine reported that “CEO pay and worker pay is now 303-to-1, which means that top CEO’s make over 300 times that of workers.”<sup>68</sup> As opposed to income, wealth refers to material ownership such as a house, car, or savings account. In the United States, the wealthiest ten percent of households own 76 percent of the wealth.<sup>69</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that within its 34 member countries, “wealth is much more concentrated than income: on average, the 10% of wealthiest households hold half of the total wealth, the next 50% hold almost the other half, while the 40% least wealthy own little over 3%.”<sup>70</sup>

These disparities of income and wealth contribute to poverty on a global scale. The World Bank, whose mission is to eradicate poverty, reports that even though 2012 estimates of poverty are lower than previous decades, “12.7 percent of the world’s population lived at or below \$1.90 a day.”<sup>71</sup> People in extreme poverty frequently live in precarious circumstances in inaccessible areas. Thus, an effect of capitalism is lack of basic needs for those at the bottom of the wealth continuum. The World Bank overview of global poverty gives a succinct description of the circumstances of those living in

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Hodgson, “Top CEOs Make More than 300Times the Average Worker,” Fortune Magazine, June 22, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/06/22/ceo-vs-worker-pay/>.

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Ingram, “If You Thought Income Inequality Was Bad, Get a Load of Wealth Inequality,” Washington Post, May 21, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/05/21/the-top-10-of-americans-own-76-of-the-stuff-and-its-dragging-our-economy-down/>.

<sup>70</sup> OECD, *In it Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264235120-en>, 18.

<sup>71</sup> World Bank, “Overview of Poverty,” accessed February 10, 2016, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>.

severe poverty: “Access to good schools, healthcare, electricity, safe water and other critical services remains elusive for many people, often determined by socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, and geography. Moreover, for those who have been able to move out of poverty, progress is often temporary: economic shocks, food insecurity and climate change threaten to rob them of their hard-won gains and force them back into poverty.”<sup>72</sup> While capitalism allows for the few at the top to have what they need and more, those at the bottom struggle to survive. Pope Francis refers to this inequity in *Laudato Si*, “In the present condition of global society, where injustices abound and growing numbers of people are deprived of basic human rights and considered expendable, the principle of the common good immediately becomes, logically and inevitably, a summons to solidarity and a preferential option for the poorest of our brothers and sisters.”<sup>73</sup>

The principle of solidarity with the poor is further complicated by migration of peoples within nations and across national boundaries, driven out of their own countries by war and inability to meet basic needs. Migration is fragmentation seen in the movement of peoples in crises around the world. The United States has experienced the migration of Mexican and Central American peoples in search of safety and economic opportunity. According to the Pew Research Center, there were “11.3 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. in 2014. The population has remained essentially stable for five years, and currently makes up 3.5% of the nation’s population.”<sup>74</sup> The

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2015), 105.

<sup>74</sup> Jens Manuel Krogstand, Jeffrey S. Passel, D’Vral Cohn, “5 Facts About Illegal Immigration in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, November 18, 2014,

political agenda in the 2017 presidential administration threatens more fragmentation for immigrants. As candidate and now as President, Donald Trump has promised to make Mexico pay for a wall to be built between the U.S. and Mexico to stop illegal immigration. He has promised, as well, to deport every illegal immigrant back to Mexico and has attempted to create travel bans that turn refugees away. Drawing out the obvious contradiction to gospel ethics, the Pope commented that “a person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges is not Christian. This is not in the Gospel.”<sup>75</sup> Wider global migration is also significant. Recent Syrian migration due to civil war has become one of the largest migrations in history. The United Nations estimates that by the end of 2016, there could be 4.7 million Syrian refugees, the most since the Rwandan genocide.<sup>76</sup> The International Organization for Migration (IOM) says that migrants largely move toward urban areas, where opportunities for work and needed resources are available. The IOM 2015 migration report, remarked that “we live in an era of unprecedented human mobility”<sup>77</sup> in which internal and international migrants are moving to cities, creating greater diversity and “new linkages among localities.”<sup>78</sup> The United Nations reports 244 million international migrants, which was an increase of 71

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<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/19/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/>.

<sup>75</sup> Joshua McElwee, “Pope Francis Questions Donald Trump’s Christianity, says border wall not from gospel,” National Catholic Reporter, February 16, 2016, <http://ncronline.org/locations/aboard-papal-plane-mexico>.

<sup>76</sup> MercyCorps, “Quick Facts: What You Need to Know about the Syria Crisis,” March 9, 2017, <http://www.mercycorps.org/articles/iraq-jordan-lebanon-turkey-syria/quick-facts-what-you-need-know-about-syria-crisis>.

<sup>77</sup> International Organization for Migration, “World Migration Report 2015,” accessed February 10, 2016, <https://www.iom.int/world-migration-report-2015>, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

million or 41 percent of the world's population living in a country other than their birth nation.<sup>79</sup> Pope Francis addressed the issue of migration in his speech to congress,

Our world is facing a refugee crisis of a magnitude not seen since the Second World War. This presents us with great challenges and many hard decisions. On this continent, too, thousands of persons are led to travel north in search of a better life for themselves and for their loved ones, in search of greater opportunities. Is this not what we want for our own children? We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation. To respond in a way which is always humane, just and fraternal.<sup>80</sup>

Migration, whether in response to natural disaster or political conflict, is a global reality that demands a gospel response.

Along with systemic poverty and migration, the earth itself is experiencing fragmentation in extraordinary ways. The ecological crisis has been a topic of much discussion and debate globally. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that the “warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia.”<sup>81</sup> The IPCC also notes that “the atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have

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<sup>79</sup> “Population Facts: Trends in International Migration, 2015,” accessed February 10, 2016, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/populationfacts/docs/MigrationPopFacts20154.pdf> (site discontinued).

<sup>80</sup> Francis, “Transcript: Pope Francis's Speech to Congress 2015.”

<sup>81</sup> “Climate Change 2014 Synthesis Report Summary for Policymakers,” accessed February 10, 2016, 4, [http://ar5-syr.ipcc.ch/ipcc/sites/default/files/AR5\\_SYR\\_Figure\\_SPM.3.png](http://ar5-syr.ipcc.ch/ipcc/sites/default/files/AR5_SYR_Figure_SPM.3.png)



increased.”<sup>82</sup> One of the costs of economic productivity is the increase in greenhouse gasses that are released into the atmosphere emitted by production and use of goods. The IPCC reports that “carbon dioxide concentrations have increased by 40% since pre-industrial times, primarily from fossil fuel emissions...”<sup>83</sup> Pope Francis connects the ills of capitalism and environmental destruction in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenseless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule.”<sup>84</sup> In turn, ecological and environmental problems have a particularly ill effect on those living in poverty. *Laudato Si* says, “Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”<sup>85</sup> The poor live in densely populated areas and in polluted environments, on real estate not wanted by those who have resources.

The fragmentation of families, communities and nations is evident in ongoing violence and conflict locally and globally. Advances in technology now give access to all-day news bringing current events into real time as in no other time in history. This ubiquitous access to media contributes to the traumatization and numbing that comes with constant exposure. The Oklahoma City bombing, riots and protests of racial injustice from the Rodney King beating to the deaths of young black men at the hands of

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>84</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (New York: Image, 2013), 45.

<sup>85</sup> Francis, *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015), 35.

policemen, school shootings beginning with Columbine, the events of September 11, 2001 and terrorist attacks since then and so many more have brought violence into our lives as never before.<sup>86</sup> The issue of gun control continues to be volatile as a part of the political polarization. The technology that has brought the events of the world into our psyche has also advanced the ability to communicate with others in a myriad of ways, yet our relationships are often impersonal with diminishment of “in person” contact. The connection between poverty and violence is not recognized overtly. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis explicitly and simply makes the connection: “Today in many places we hear a call for greater security. But until exclusion and inequality in society and between peoples are reversed, it will be impossible to eliminate violence. The poor and the poorer peoples are accused of violence, yet without equal opportunities the different forms of aggression and conflict will find a fertile terrain for growth and eventually explode.”<sup>87</sup>

Fragmentation is also visible in U.S. politics. Within the country, the party extremes of liberal and conservative with little middle ground have become the polarization of good and evil. Globally, the U.S. looks out at the world and sees evil in others but has no capacity for self-reflection that leads to taking responsibility for its own moral deficits.<sup>88</sup> This polarizing “new conservatism” is not about conserving the good of humanity but about “preserving ourselves from the facts” in order to align with capitalist values of winning and superiority. Such a milieu of polarization has two dangerous inclinations. First it ignores that society and culture are intimately related to religion,

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<sup>86</sup> John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, xxxvii.

<sup>87</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47.

<sup>88</sup> John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, xxxix.

faith, and spirituality. Second, it leads to an enmeshment of faith with politics and cultural standards in which faith is adapted to those standards rather than engaged in honest dialogue.<sup>89</sup> This is often heard in the media when patriotism and Christianity become one and the same or in the message that faith leads to financial success or popularity. This distortion also contributes to polarization. However, the media messages are rarely about the poor, marginalized or abandoned unless in some form of sensationalism.<sup>90</sup> The identification of faith to cultural standards reveals that we are not good at self-critique, especially in areas of sex, war, and money.<sup>91</sup>

Perhaps the most sobering form of fragmentation evident in capitalism is disregard for human dignity in the commodification of the human person. This was evident early in the history of the United States. Native peoples were and continue to be exploited and displaced for the sake of acquiring their lands and continue to face issues in the controversy of the Dakota pipeline access. Later the slavery of Africans and the labor they performed sustained the lucrative economy of the South.<sup>92</sup> Today, consumer capitalism is the underlying criteria for evaluating personal worth. Personal success often means that one has competitively produced in one's job and can therefore be a consumer who practices the acquiring of more than enough material goods. Consequently, people relate to each other as objects. When another person is in the way of one's success, winning becomes most important. Motivation is acted out in domination rather than loving, caring mutuality. Power takes priority over compassion, and this "power over" often manifests in degrees of violence. People are expendable as when a loyal, long

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., xii.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>92</sup> Joe Holland, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, 18.

serving employee is let go before retirement or when civilians killed in war are simply collateral damage.<sup>93</sup> Certainly the awareness of human trafficking in recent history exemplifies extreme and tragic commodification of persons.

Advances in technology, diversity of goods, productivity seem to validate the ideology of “Democratic Capitalism.” However, it does not acknowledge the loss of “human personhood” in the cost to the poor and underdeveloped nations whose lack pays for capitalist success. Nor does it recognize the loss of human dignity and spiritual diminishment that occurs as the world becomes more technological, consumerist, and violent.<sup>94</sup> Then, as consumers, persons’ identities are based on external realities such as the need to conform to styles or trends and to have material possessions that culturally communicate status. I become what I do, how much I produce, and how much I own. With such focus on the exterior, interiority and depth are ignored, leading to self rejection evidenced in depression and addictions.<sup>95</sup> We medicate and numb the internal emptiness which cannot be filled by “getting and spending.”<sup>96</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* articulates the commodification of persons in this way: “The worldwide crisis affecting finance and the economy lays bare their imbalances and, above all, their lack of real concern for human beings; [a person] is reduced to one of his[/her] needs alone: consumption.”<sup>97</sup>

Post modernity has created a “new normal” in a global society. Fragmentation, violence, displacement of peoples, injustices that flow from capitalism has irreversibly changed people’s lives. Circumstances beyond anyone’s control have shifted lives

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<sup>93</sup> John F. Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, 51-53.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

<sup>96</sup> William Wordsworth, “The World is Too Much with Us,” The Poetry Foundation, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174833>.

<sup>97</sup> Francis, *Evagelii Gaudium*, 45.

forever. The fast pace changes are not temporary and they affect one's entire life: self understanding, relationships, values, coping behaviors, family, perceived needs, and spirituality. While these shifts may be either positive or negative, promote or diminish human dignity, they are the signs of the times to be read in light of the gospel. The life of religious charisms has the power to influence the "new normal" with the lens of faith.<sup>98</sup>

The spiritual consequences of the negative aspects of post modernity are evident in the above paragraphs. To articulate further, Franciscan scholar David Couturier notes that post modernity has solidified the privacy of the individual self over and against the value of community or relationality. "The modern and post-modern self is understood as privacy set free from the ancient and debilitating moorings of oppressive social conditioning and communal expectation. We imagine that our 'truest self' lies somewhere beneath or beyond the expectation and definition of an inherited common nature. Our society rejects the notion of a fundamentally 'relational self' for fear that definitions of any kind will detour the independent self from achieving his or her individual pursuit of happiness."<sup>99</sup> The implication is that, "individuals are to secure God by pulling themselves up to the divine standard by their own intellectual or spiritual bootstraps."<sup>100</sup> Couturier paints a challenging picture of relating to God in post modern times.

Those who seek God in the modern or post modern mode are not expected anymore simply to discover God, whether in the world or in the Word. Their

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<sup>98</sup> Sandra Schneiders, "The Ongoing Challenge of Renewal in Contemporary Religious Life" CORI, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://www.cori.ie/sandra-schneiders-paper-delivered-at-cori-conference-25th-april-2014/>, (site discontinued), 5-6.

<sup>99</sup> David Couturier, *The Four Conversions: A Spirituality of Transformation* (South Bend: The Victoria Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

choices are starker than that. Because the link between humanity and creation has been broken or, at the very least, severely strained by the arbiters of postmodernism, men and women are called upon either to manufacture or abandon God. Modern freedom, if nothing else, is draconian. Listening to today's philosophical 'prophets of doom,' men and women cannot expect to find God in creation or revelation anymore. Objectivity has been indicted and God has been obscured by a hermeneutic of suspicion at every turn. In this epistemic twilight, men and women today are expected to 'create' their own gods from the broken shards of freedom that have been bequeathed to them. They are to make their own way of life through the machinations of their applied will to power. Is it any wonder that some contemporary spiritualities appear narcissistic? Is it a surprise to anyone that men and women today suffer new and severe forms of spiritual exhaustion as they are forced to design the divine out of the raw material of modern commercial life?<sup>101</sup>

Couturier notes that the Christian response to this individualistic and privatistic character of post modernity is evident in the experience of conversion that is relational and social. He goes on to describe the Christian response through a Franciscan lens.

...we are not competitors for the scarce resources of the earth under a stingy God. We are brothers and sisters to one another under and with a God who is good, all good, supremely good, all the time to everyone...we are creatures of a loving God and thus something other than atoms waiting to be split into greater market shares. We are something more than the commodification of our desires. As creatures,

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 6.

there is something distinctly indivisible about the human person, and irreducible relationality that draws us ever beyond ourselves to find ourselves only in the self-transcendence of our loving and willing the other in the Other.”<sup>102</sup>

The Franciscan understanding of the all good God who blesses humanity with creation expressed by Couturier draws us from fragmentation to connection.

The Franciscan charism of conversion is in itself a call to that same conversion in that it invites people to come out of the isolation of individualism and privatization of religion and into a communal relationship and ethical responsibility. The connection between religious transformation and social change needs to be re-established in the dynamic of conversion.<sup>103</sup> Thus, ongoing conversion does not exist in a vacuum but is a “prophetic presence” that challenges the validity of post modern values and lifestyles.<sup>104</sup>

Br. Gerry Lobo, theologian from India, offers a concise appraisal of post modernity:

Political, economic and cultural globalization has emerged as the dominant system and ideology in the world today. It is a totalitarian ideology affecting all areas of life. It is also characterized by new-liberal democracy, free market capitalism, military power and non-spiritual values of a western civilization. The logic of profit, the logic of exclusion failing to respect human persons have destabilized and created imbalance in the biosphere. The quality of life is degraded.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>104</sup> Gerry Lobo, “Franciscan Prophetic Differentiation: Evangelical Conversion as Disturbing Presence,” *Propositum: Conversion and Contemplation: Cornerstones of the Third Order Regular Franciscan Charism* 15, no. 1, (May 2012): 30.

The human person in the modern or the post-modern society as another “I” to be befriended, considered as a brother or a sister is hardly possible in spite of the enlightenment received from social sciences. Each one lives by himself or herself as someone who is useful for someone else. The other is a convenience for one’s own desires...The other is seen as an adversary, a competitor and is dangerous...<sup>105</sup>

This is the reality to which the charism of conversion speaks. Lobo articulates the value of the charism for post modernity as, “in the context of the history of the world today, our conversion to the Gospel as Franciscans could be a solution to the human predicament created by modern scientific and technocratic developments. Our conversion must mean denunciation of power, possession and honour...”<sup>106</sup>

### **Religious Life in Post Modernity**

#### **Shifts in population of Women Religious**

The renewal of religious life has taken place in this post modern milieu and has been shaped by it in part. As stated in Chapter one, religious life is in the midst of significant transition. The shift from a hierarchical way of life to an interdependent way of life has certainly been influenced by individualism, as well as by materialism reflected to a degree in some of the choices individual sisters make. The lines blurred between cultural individualism and adult autonomy that accompanies psychological maturity. Sisters who once had no independence found that they could now live and function alone and have things that were never allowed in their former austere and rigid lives. At the same time sisters experience a call to attend to those suffering, oppressed and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 31.



marginalized as well as the systems that place those people in circumstances of injustice. Thus, the numbers of women religious are fewer, but the energy for living the gospel is very healthy. A 2014 Center for Applied Research of the Apostolate (CARA) study of women religious analyzes the shift that is taking place.

The overall change in the population of women religious in the United States over the past 50 years is one of dramatic decline. This decline has been well documented. The numbers show that the overall population of women religious in the United States grew rapidly over the course of the twentieth century and reached its peak in 1965 with 181,421 sisters. Today, the total number of women religious in the United States has fallen below 50,000, representing a 72.5 percent decline from the peak total in 1965. There are about as many women religious in the United States now as there were a hundred years ago.<sup>107</sup>

However, rather than simply determining that statistics equal decline and eventual demise, CARA looks at the ways in which specific congregations have chosen to address the shift, in effect slowing the decline. Some institutes chose internal reorganization in order to use resources more effectively.<sup>108</sup> Other congregations merged with each other to form larger congregations, broadening resources.<sup>109</sup> Women religious have sought ways to continue to live out their missions in the face of change.

Perspectives about the shift vary. As indicated above, some look at the current reality and surmise that this vocation is fading as the elder sisters die and fewer new members enter. The summary of the National Religious Vocation Conference study states

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<sup>107</sup> Erick Berrelleza, Gautier, Mary L., Gray, Mark M. "Population Trends Among Religious Institutes of Women" *Special Report*, Washington, D.C., CARA, Fall 2014, 1.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

that “nine in ten finally professed women (91 per cent) are age 60 and over in 2009...a majority of those under the age of 60 are in their 50’s.”<sup>110</sup> The median age of women entering religious life in 2009 was 29 with the average age being 32. New members experience a ten year gap between themselves and professed members.<sup>111</sup> This is sometimes interpreted as a deterrent for young women who seek peers within the institute. In light of these statistics, Amy Hereford in *Religious Life at the Crossroads* says that this demographic divides the population of congregations into two cohorts. Those who entered between 1930 and 1950 are in the majority while those in the minority cohort are ages twenty-five to fifty-nine. According to Hereford, the older majority has the task of bringing the Vatican II renewal and even their congregations to completion while the minority cohort, honoring their heritages, have the task of creating the future of religious life.<sup>112</sup> In dreaming the future of religious life, this cohort has the task of living the gospel in post modernity, bringing their various charisms to life for and with the people of God.

Another prevalent opinion regarding the shifts in religious life is one that believes young women are simply no longer interested in religious life due to the influences of culture.<sup>113</sup> However, recent statistics do not support this position because a 2012 study shows that in the Vatican II generation of women, “as many as 250,000 never-married

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<sup>110</sup> Bendyna, Mary E., Gautier, Mary L., “Vocation Study Overview: Executive Summary.” National Religious Vocation Conference, 2009, accessed March 06, 2016, <https://nrvc.net/247/article/executive-summary-english-1022>.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Amy Hereford, *Religious Life at the Crossroads: A School for Mystics and Prophets*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), xii-xiv.

<sup>113</sup> Mary Johnson, Patricia Wittberg, and Mary L. Gautier, *New Generations of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 12.

Catholic women have ‘very seriously’ considered becoming a sister at one time or other in their lives.”<sup>114</sup> Sr. Marie Augusta Neal cites the shifts in society and Church as reasons for fewer women entering congregations. Whereas in former times, women entered in their teens and were educated by their congregations while engaged in ministry; in recent history congregations set internal guidelines that new members come with college degrees and work experience. Neal also notes that at the time she was writing congregations were not inviting the newest immigrants to consider religious life and that overall, sisters do not have as much contact with young women as when they were teachers in parochial schools.<sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, the 2009 NRVC study paints a picture of new members of religious life in a very positive light. The women who enter contemporary religious life mirror the diversity of society. The study found that “compared to finally professed members, those in initial formation are more likely to come from non-Caucasian/white/Anglo background: 21 percent are Hispanic/Latina, 14 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6 percent are African/African American.”<sup>116</sup> The study also described new members as having largely been raised as Catholics, attended Catholic school, and participated in ministry both paid and volunteer.<sup>117</sup> They are attracted to religious life because of a desire for prayer, spiritual growth and community life primarily but not as much because of the ministry or mission of a congregation. They did want to minister with other members of their congregation or minister within a congregationally sponsored ministry.<sup>118</sup> The study

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>116</sup> Mary E. Bendyna, Mary L. Gautier, “Vocation Study Overview,” 4.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

also says that new members didn't receive encouragement from parents or family, nor were they encouraged by parish priests or parishioners.<sup>119</sup> These new members experience religious life as no recent previous generations have and will need to create new structures in order to live the charism of religious life and the charisms of the congregations into which they are formed. Not only is this challenging for those who enter congregations, but it is also challenging for those who are guiding them in the formation process.

### **Generational Influences**

In looking back over the past one hundred years, roughly five generations, the emergence of post modernity in society and culture have affected the vocational landscape in the United States. Sociologists categorize the generations based on the historical context into which they were born, and the Church has corresponding generational categories based on the historical developments before and after the Second Vatican Council. The generation that was born 1915-1929, often called the "Greatest Generation," grew up during the Great Depression and many fought in World War II. With a certain sense of the common good, they learned to sacrifice personal plans for the good of family and society.<sup>120</sup> The following generation was labeled the "Silent Generation." A smaller population than the previous generation, they were born 1930-1945 and were sometimes characterized as passive in their civic lives. Yet, they began and were active in the Civil Rights movement and in war protests.<sup>121</sup> The Catholic population in these two generations would have come into their twenties before Vatican

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>120</sup> Mary Johnson, et al., *New Generations of Catholic Sisters*, 62.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

II. The members of this pre-Vatican II generation likely were immersed in Catholic culture through parishes, parochial schools, and ethnic neighborhoods affording little contact with non Catholics. The changes of Vatican II were welcomed by some and rejected by others of these generations.<sup>122</sup> The next generation, 1946-1961, are the Baby Boomers, who came into the world beginning nine months after the end of World War II (birth rates did not fall again until 1961). The members of this generation were the first to have television and radio, as well as the first to become the targets of mass marketing.<sup>123</sup> Catholics of this generation were born prior to Vatican Council II and thus experienced constant change within the Church, which they generally received positively. They welcomed the mass in English and a more participatory experience of worship.<sup>124</sup>

The two generations that followed are very different than the preceding ones in that many of their members do not practice their faith in the same way or perhaps even as Catholics. Generation X, born 1962-1981, grew up in an atmosphere of corrupt politicians, economic uncertainties, and divorce. These children were “latchkey kids,” often coming to an empty household after school. They learned mistrust of institutions, including religious ones, early in their lives. The societal chaos that they experienced influenced them in that they hesitated to make lasting commitments.<sup>125</sup> Catholics of this generation are the post Vatican II generation. Their faith formation did not include contact with many sisters and focused on experiential faith with little attention to Church history or teaching. Unlike previous generations, as they begin their families, many are

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 63-64

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 64

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 62.

not returning to the Church to practice their faith.<sup>126</sup> The generation that follows them is the millennial generation, born after 1982. This group is large and the most ethnically diverse. They grew up with internet, computers, cell phones and other technology. They live at home into their twenties or beyond and delay marriage and family. Members of this generation have huge college loan debt and yet are positive about their future.<sup>127</sup> Catholic members of this generation have minimal experiences of Catholic practices, know very little of Church teaching, but have more trust in the Church than previous generations. As the most ethnically diverse generation, less than half are white (39%).<sup>128</sup>

As evident from the above description of generational characteristics of society and Church, the gap between knowledge of Church teaching and practices and young Catholics has widened with the Generation X and Millennial cohorts. These factors influence whether young women from these generations have any experience of sisters to even consider life as a religious sister.<sup>129</sup> The women in these generations have grown up in an environment of religious variety that is eclectic and multi-layered. They have choices and sometimes piece together a belief system that incorporates this variety.<sup>130</sup> Families are not encouraging their daughters to enter community. Many have large education debt, and congregations are hesitant to take on the debt those potential members would bring with them.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, congregations set guidelines that new members receive their college education prior to entering or that immigrants must be documented in order to enter. Such guidelines keep poor or marginalized women from

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

entering religious institutes. A number of young women have chosen not to participate in Catholic faith and are not in places where invitations to consider religious life would be extended to them.<sup>132</sup> Technology has also changed the nature of discernment. Searchers can easily explore, compare and contrast the identities and missions of religious communities on the internet.<sup>133</sup> These generational influences are complex and are interwoven with culture and social movements as will be evident in the next section.

### **Cultural Influences**

Other influences on membership are secularization and the feminist movement. Sisters, who had opportunities for higher education, held executive positions in institutions even before women in the mainstream population acquired the career and vocational opportunities that increased with the women's movement.<sup>134</sup> However, renewal of religious life and the feminist movement happened simultaneously, leading all women to assess their identity in new ways. Many of the Vatican II generation left their congregations as they became aware of opportunities for women and a growing sense of self as mature adults.<sup>135</sup> Today, women in the millennial cohort are choosing to engage in professional ministry, serving the Church without belonging to a religious institute. Women no longer need to belong to a religious community in order to be credentialed as valid ministers. Also, women have moved away from the Catholic Church to other Christian denominations in order to serve as ordained ministers, a call denied them in the Roman Catholic tradition.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

As women in general experienced new freedom, so did sisters. No longer cloistered in their convents and isolated from culture, post modernity influenced their lives as they followed the Vatican II directives to update and renew. Still, signs of post modern fragmentation are evident in congregations today. Consumerism and individualism have challenged simple living and common life. The question becomes how do I/we live “in” the world and do so with faithfulness to the commitment I/we have made? In the past several decades, sisters have moved out of convents that housed large groups to living in two’s, three’s or singly. Common life has been more difficult to live because as congregations become smaller and ministries more diverse and geographically spread out; living with members of one’s own congregation has become infrequent. Some may live with members of other congregations, sharing common life across charisms. The influence of individualism may be seen in the many sisters who do live singly because of geography or ministry but also by choice. Living alone offers more autonomy with regard to material possessions and free time without daily accountability to schedule and commitments that come when living with others. As more lived alone, sisters explained the fragmentation as a difference that exists between common life and community. A sister belongs to the community but does not necessarily share daily common life with other sisters. Yet, sisters are accountable for their use of congregational resources and for their part in furthering the stated mission of the congregation. For example, as cell phone technology advanced and became the norm, the question of having one’s own phone was and still is at times a decision that some see as a want and others as a need. Choices that relate to living the vow of poverty are not as clear or rigid



as in former times. Some identify sisters' lifestyles as more upper middle class than lives of simplicity reflective of the vow of poverty.

Potential new members see this fragmentation and question the quality of community life that they observe. They also observe the glaring age gap between the older, majority cohort and the newer, younger cohort. For most congregations, there is a wide age gap between the older members and the newer members because there are ten to fifteen year gaps of time in which no one entered or those who entered discerned to leave. As stated above, in 2009, 91% of women religious in the U.S. were age 60 or older, and most of those under 60 were in their 50's.<sup>137</sup> When younger women see only women who might be their grandmothers' age, they sometimes are discouraged by the lack of peers with whom they can share community life. Another difficulty is the realization that this aging population will gradually die and leave the newer members to go forward. Grief from the loss of these significant relationships, as well as fear of what religious life will look like when those wisdom women have died, raise credible concerns for discernment and formation.

This wide gap between the generations creates difficulty in the cross generational relationships in congregational life. In order to bridge the gap and attract younger members, religious institutes need to know the culture of young adults, clearly communicate their own institutional identities and look for ways to adapt accordingly. In 2009, the most recent study of religious vocations, new members said that common prayer, their institute's spirituality, community life, and common ministry attracted them to religious life. They preferred to live in large groups (eight or more) or medium groups

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<sup>137</sup>Bendyna and Gautier, "Vocation Study Overview," 3.

(four to seven). They also preferred to minister with other sisters in their congregation and/or minister in one of the sponsored ministries of the congregation.<sup>138</sup> However, newer members come in to congregations where friendships and groups of sisters are long established, creating a difficulty in finding a sense of belonging. Sacraments and traditions of the Church are important to them. To sisters of the Vatican II generation, these preferences superficially may seem like a regression to the 1950's lifestyle of the convent, but those who are discerning a call to religious life are responding fittingly to how their culture has formed them. They are likely seeking the kind of grounding and stability that has been absent from their lives. They are seeking depth and meaning in the context of a continuously shifting world.

Their responses are consistent with research on emerging adults. In *Souls in Transition*, Christian Smith presents a picture of young adults, ages 18-23, as living in the fragmentation of constant transition. They live in a culture that includes parental divorce, moving in and out of their parents' home well into their twenties, changing schools, changing college majors, changing jobs, changing roommates, changing friends, and changing careers. Marriage is often delayed as they go to school to complete graduate degrees. Generally, they have little stability and are overwhelmed by the transitions in their lives. They often describe this with the simple statement, "A lot of stuff is going on right now."<sup>139</sup> Though they are aiming to be self-sufficient, they describe themselves as having very little money. Even so, they are optimistic about their future. They are accepting of differences, but they believe that no one is able to fully understand or

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>139</sup> Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 34.

impose standards on another. They have developed a sort of “multicultural individualism” that accepts difference without judgment or without influencing others, a kind of “personal sovereignty” in which they are only responsible for themselves. In the midst of their chaotic lives, religion and spirituality have been largely absent.<sup>140</sup> That they are searching for stability and belonging in the context of religious life makes sense because constant transitions in their lives have been the norm.

These women are looking for religious life in a very different context than their predecessors. The Catholic population in the United States was an immigrant community that organized itself largely along ethnic lines. Women religious responded to the needs of poor and working class immigrants. Schools and hospitals were established to meet those needs. However, this Catholic population into the succeeding generations has become middle class. Sisters handed over the ministry of teaching to lay teachers.<sup>141</sup> This created a financial dilemma that continues to exist in the Catholic school systems. Sisters taught in their schools for little or nothing, but now schools have to financially support the salaries of teachers. As the population shifted generationally, it also shifted regionally in that the Catholic population is more evenly distributed throughout the United States. Even so, many Catholic schools have closed due to financial constraints and shifting demographics. In many cases, Catholic schools in the Midwest or the Northeast that close or merge leave poor and underserved communities without the quality education that was once offered to the poor immigrant communities. Yet, Catholic communities in the West and the South have grown and constructed new schools and parishes to accommodate the

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.,48-49.

<sup>141</sup> Mary Johnson, et al., *New Generations of Catholic Sisters*, 10-11.

needs of the communities.<sup>142</sup> Within this reality, young women have little or no exposure to women religious. The post Vatican II church has focused on marriage and to some extent the single life but has not continued to offer ongoing, convenient ways for young women to explore the vocation of religious community.<sup>143</sup>

### **Ecclesial Interventions**

The interventions of the institutional Church have also influenced women's religious institutes. Chapter 1 reviewed the Vatican II call for renewal of religious institutes. In the 1950's Pope Pius XII requested the initiation of the Conference of Major Superiors of Women (CMSW). This later became the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). In 1971, a small group of superiors broke away from LCWR because they believed that LCWR institutes had taken renewal too far, compromising the integrity of religious life. This group was first known as Consortium Perfectae Caritatis (CPC) and in 1995 was approved by the Vatican as the Conference of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR). They exist as a more traditional, conservative alternative or even a competitor to LCWR.<sup>144</sup> The majority of women's religious institutes (90%) belong to LCWR, while the minority belongs to CMSWR. The United States is the only nation that has two national associations for women religious.

Since Vatican II, the Church has intervened in religious institutes three times. The first was a study of the decline in vocations in the United States that took place in the 1980's, titled *Essential Elements of Religious Life*. According to Sandra Schneiders, this document "was regressive and repressive" and "basically stillborn." It was not

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>144</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, *Prophets in Their Own Country: Women Religious Bearing Witness to the Gospel in a Troubled Church* (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 4.

promulgated because not enough Vatican officials would sign it in approval, and the majority of women religious did not recognize it as valid.<sup>145</sup> A small group, CMSWR congregations, embraced the document as the primary guide to religious life. Sandra Schneiders says that “a small minority of Religious congregations, or at least their leadership, made that document a kind of ‘magna carta’ for their own understanding of conciliar renewal, and this minority considers itself the faithful remnant defending authentic Religious Life as expressed in Essential Elements from the vast majority of their Sisters who, in their opinion, have gone astray.”<sup>146</sup>

In 2009, two more interventions were abruptly announced. Schneiders locates the origin of these interventions in a CMSWR symposium on religious life after Vatican II. Cardinal Franc Rode attended and during the meeting, Sr. Sara Butler, a conservative theologian, requested that the Cardinal launch an “apostolic visitation” of U.S. women religious whom she believed were not faithful to Church teaching and were a source of scandal to the faithful.<sup>147</sup> Cardinal Rode, known for his own disapproval of Vatican II reforms, put the investigation in motion.<sup>148</sup> The first was an investigation into women’s religious institutes. The investigation included three phases. The Church assigned Sister Mary Clare Millinea as “visitor.” She met with and interviewed general superiors about their congregations. The second phase was an information gathering in which each congregation received a large survey packet that asked intrusive and even canonically inappropriate questions. Most communities chose to leave certain sections blank, particularly concerning finances. Some of the requested information could easily be

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 4-5

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 4.

found in constitutions, which are on file at the Vatican because they are approved by the Vatican. This was noted in the response to the survey. In the third phase, selected congregations were visited by “visitors”, sisters who volunteered for this role. In order to fund the visitation, Cardinal Rode asked the U.S. bishops to provide the \$1.1 million dollar cost of the investigation but the request was received negatively. The cardinal then appealed for contributions from individual bishops, though no one knows which ones may have contributed. The congregations selected for visitation were asked to provide hospitality, computers, and shredders for the visitors. The sisters were never asked to verify the accuracy of the information that was gathered and the results were to remain secret.

The second intervention was a doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) also begun in 2009. In April of 2012, the CDF announced the investigation in an eight page denunciation of certain LCWR statements and practices. In this document, the CDF mandated a reform of the LCWR, appointing an archbishop and two bishops from the United States as overseers. Their presence was “for review, guidance and approval, where necessary, of the work of the LCWR.”<sup>149</sup> The document named three areas of concern: the addresses given at the LCWR Assemblies, policies of corporate dissent, radical feminism. With regard to the speakers addressing the LCWR assemblies, the document stated that they “manifest problematic statements and serious theological, even doctrinal errors.”<sup>150</sup> The CDF, identifying LCWR protests of the issue of women’s

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<sup>149</sup> “Doctrinal Assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious,” April 18, 2012, <http://www.vatican.va>.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

ordination and ministry to the homosexual community expressed in letters to the Holy See, said that “The terms of the letters suggests that these sisters collectively take a position not in agreement with the Church’s teaching on human sexuality. It is a serious matter when these Leadership Teams are not providing effective leadership and example to their communities, but place themselves outside the Church’s teaching.”<sup>151</sup> The document also cited “a prevalence of certain radical feminist themes incompatible with the Catholic faith in some of the programs and presentations sponsored by the LCWR, including theological interpretations that risk distorting faith in Jesus... Moreover, some commentaries on “patriarchy” distort the way in which Jesus has structured sacramental life in the Church; others even undermine the revealed doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the inspiration of Sacred Scripture.” The document mandated the revision of LCWR statutes, review publications, programs and speakers, as well as to review the role of prayer and worship in LCWR assemblies. According to the mandate, the investigation could continue for five years, though it only lasted three. LCWR maintained a stance of dialogue and mutual respect. The language of the final report had a respectful tone. It concluded,

Our work together in response to the Mandate has borne much fruit, for which we give thanks to God and the gentle guidance of the Holy Spirit. The very fact of such substantive dialogue between bishops and religious has been a blessing to be appreciated and further encouraged. The Commitment of LCWR leadership to its crucial role in service to the mission and membership of the Conference will

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

continue to guide and strengthen LCWR's witness to the great vocation of Religious Life, to its sure foundation in Christ, and to ecclesial communion.<sup>152</sup>

By the time the investigation concluded, Pope Francis had replaced Pope Benedict XVI, and the cardinal leaders of CICLSAL and the CDF had changed. The public support of sisters in the United States, as well as the changes in ecclesial officials, led to a markedly softer tone in the end than had been at the onset of these interventions.

### **Contemporary Vowed Life**

The post modern characteristics cited above with the demographic and cultural shifts of the past fifty years, as well as the recent strained ecclesial relationships create a new moment in which women are living the canonical vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The lifestyle of women religious, grounded by the vows, is itself a response to the struggles of post modern life rooted in capitalism. These lived vows, through which members of institutes manifest their charisms, are a direct contrast to the fragmentation and disintegration of postmodern life. Diarmuid O'Murchu names the vows in ways that counter post modern fragmentation. He describes the three as the vow of relatedness (chastity),<sup>153</sup> the vow of justice-making or mutual sustainability (poverty)<sup>154</sup> and the vow of mutual relating (obedience).<sup>155</sup> The vow of chastity is a commitment to relationships that are mutual and loving in a world of relational and sexual distortion. In a capitalist culture where garnering power so that one has "power over" and brutal competition is the

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<sup>152</sup> "Vatican Announcement on End of LCWR Mandate? *Scribd*, April 16, 2015, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/262046698/Vatican-announcement-on-end-of-LCWR-mandate>.

<sup>153</sup> Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Consecrated Religious Life: The Changing Paradigms* (New York: Orbis Books, 2005), 192.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.



norm, the vow of obedience is to live in an attitude of mutual listening toward “power with” the other. As the world values accumulation of wealth as the measure of success, the vow of poverty is to live simply and in solidarity with the poor, choosing to live with enough material possessions for one’s needs.<sup>156</sup> As a social psychologist, O’Murchu creates new categories to express the significance of the vows in contemporary life.

More recently, Sandra Schneiders explains extensively the role of the vows from a theological perspective in light of post modernity. As O’Murchu describes celibacy in terms of relationship, Schneiders defines celibacy as “the freely chosen response to a personally discerned vocation to charismatically grounded, religiously motivated, sexually abstinent, lifelong commitment to Christ that is externally symbolized by remaining unmarried.”<sup>157</sup> The key understandings in this definition are that celibacy, while a choice, is also a call and one that is a gift (charism). The reason for the choice is religious as opposed to choosing celibacy because of circumstances such as a focus on a career rather than on marriage or partnership with one significant other.<sup>158</sup> In the context of religious life, celibacy as a vow is not an imposed condition, nor is simply about giving up genital sexual activity. Rather, the vow speaks of a commitment to relationship in and through Christ. Schneiders says that “religious need to find in their relationship with Christ the affective depth, totality, and effectiveness that will nurture their hearts to human and spiritual maturity.” This relationship is grounded by contemplative practices that nurture one’s relationship to Christ.<sup>159</sup> Celibacy is about friendship. It affords religious life the “unique vocation in the Church [which] entails living and witnessing to

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>157</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *Selling All* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 117.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>159</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *Buying the Field* (New York: Paulist Press, 2013), 97.

the mystery of God's abundant sufficiency as the exclusive, primary love of a human heart and that this primary love, like that of a faithful spouse, does not constrict one's relational capacity but expands, enriches, and purifies it."<sup>160</sup> Vowed celibacy is not constraining but freeing.

As a counterpoint to often superficial, broken and abusive relationships of post modernity, celibate life frees one to enter into relationships in community and ministry in order to give witness to the community relationship to which Jesus invites all.<sup>161</sup>

Schneiders asserts that "freely chosen, religiously motivated, publicly lived, chaste nonmarriage cannot fail to raise questions in our sex-saturated and pleasure obsessed culture."<sup>162</sup> The vow of celibacy "makes a powerful statement about the autonomy and value of the individual person and the capacity of the human being for personal self-transcendence in love, about the enduring quality of love as motivation for the whole of one's life, and about the fecundity and value of such love in society and Church."<sup>163</sup> In other words, those who live and embrace the vow of celibacy demonstrate to the world the goodness of relationship to God/Jesus and to those with whom they relate within and beyond their congregation.

O'Murchu's description of the vow of poverty as justice-making is in keeping with Schneiders' discussion of this vow. She describes the experience of lived poverty both before the Vatican II renewal and after. Sisters transitioned from a sheltered, enclosed economy of the convent in which they had little or no discretionary money prior to Vatican II to an experience of having access to money, car keys and shopping. They

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<sup>160</sup> Schneiders, *Selling All*, 245.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

came to understand that they were not living the kind of poverty from which so many people suffered because of lack of education, transportation, health care, and daily needs.<sup>164</sup> This new awareness of significant poverty called for a new understanding of the vow. According to Schneiders, the vow of poverty is a commitment “not to pursue wealth, the all consuming passion of human beings striving to shore up their existence by providing security for themselves. Religious confidently live in the security of total trust in the God who is utterly trustworthy.”<sup>165</sup> The vow is in service to the community in that it leads to living in community “in which all contribute according to ability and all receive according to need.”<sup>166</sup> The commitment of the vow is to lifelong mutuality and interdependence.<sup>167</sup> In living the vow of poverty, the ongoing question is “what does the maldistribution or lack of economic resources and conversely the access to material well-being for all people mean in the plan of God for humanity and the world and how does/can Religious Life reflect and participate in that divine design?”<sup>168</sup> The vow of poverty recognizes that all is gift and moves one toward solidarity with those who are truly poor.

The lived vow of poverty contrasts profoundly with the values of a capitalist consumer culture. The values practiced by sisters that sustain this vow include simplicity of life, solidarity with the poor, moderation in use of material goods, financial accountability, community sustaining frugality, and equal access to common resources.<sup>169</sup> These values characterize what Schneiders calls a gift economy in which all is given to

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<sup>164</sup> Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 150-151.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

be used but not owned. Material goods serve the community and so are to be shared as needed. The opposite is true in a commodity driven economy in which material goods are acquired for personal ownership and to denote social and economic status.<sup>170</sup>

“Evangelical poverty is a substitution of a total economic interdependence for the anxious concern for taking care of ‘number one’ and its overflow is ministry to the disadvantaged pursued not for gain but for love.”<sup>171</sup> Thus the vow of poverty has the internal dynamic of determining the way in which sisters live together with regard to their resources, as well as the impetus to reach out in ministry to those on the margins of a consumer society who are in need of justice.

Another aspect of building justice is evident in the vow of obedience, according to O’Murchu who names the vow of obedience as the vow of right relationship. The history and complexity of this vow is beyond the scope of this chapter. Essentially, Schneiders points out that the pre-Vatican II understanding of obedience was simple and clear. Sisters followed an orderly schedule, doing as they were told in daily matters within the convent and in ministry. After the renewal, obedience grew more complicated as sisters became more autonomous. Of this Schneiders say, “religious obedience is not primarily or essentially about the relationship of religious to the official authority of the Church. It is essentially participation in the obedience of Jesus who did always the will of the one sending Him.”<sup>172</sup> The root of obedience means to listen, and obedience is in many ways the practice of listening individually and communally. Schneiders calls obedience “the commitment to discern at all times in all circumstances God’s will and way in this

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 236-237.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 548.

world.”<sup>173</sup> Further, obedience is the appropriate response to authority, ‘the loving response by which the person in self giving response becomes increasingly one with the self-giving God.’<sup>174</sup> In practice, obedience is ongoing dialogue and discernment in attempt to be faithful. Obedience is about one’s relationship to authority and power. In religious life, congregations today live the vow with an understanding of authority that is less hierarchical and more relational. Sisters have “the right to be heard and heeded.”<sup>175</sup> Each sister “has a right to speak the truth to one another in love and each member has an obligation to hear and heed, that is, to listen...and respond appropriately.”<sup>176</sup> Such dialogue requires genuine care and mutual listening.

O’Murchu’s description of obedience as right relationship points to a change in the style of decision-making within community. The hierarchical model is shifting into collegiality or what some congregations are calling the leadership of the whole. Collegiality changes the locus of power from a few at the top to a shared power throughout the congregation. O’Murchu says, “Power is primarily a gift given to empower, so that all can collaborate in the task of co-creation for the good of the whole body.”<sup>177</sup> This sharing of power is in contrast to a post modern world in which many are powerless, poor, and disenfranchised from local and global communities and resources.<sup>178</sup> Women religious model a different use of power and decision making than much of the post modern culture that surrounds them.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 142-143.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 565.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 439.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 441.

<sup>177</sup> O’Murchu, *Consecrated Religious*, p.234.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Power and authority in post modern society is rooted in capitalism. The more money one has, the more power and authority one supposedly has. This is evident in Donald Trump's seemingly unlikely rise to become the U.S. President. The hierarchical order of power and authority in which some are superior and exert power while others are inferior and are oppressed by that power is a reversal of the communal experience of the vow of obedience in religious life. Schneiders points to this reversal by saying, "if the basic affirmation of ontological equality among all people is true, then no one except God is ontologically 'superior' to any human being."<sup>179</sup> Internally, the practice of obedience is in the discipline of sisters listening and responding to one another in love. Externally, the vow reflects a commitment to confront, individually and corporately, power structures that oppress. In a sense, it is a refusal to fear the kind of "power over" that determines life and death that is not God.<sup>180</sup>

### **Prophetic Role of Religious Life**

The prophetic character of the vows in post modernity is the lived expression of charism by religious in the world. The responses to the ecclesial interventions substantiate that religious life still has vitality. This can be seen first in the responses of women religious. Through the LCWR, women religious stood together in discernment to make decisions about how they would respond to both the visitation and the investigation. They responded non-violently but assertively and experienced a deeper sense of unity and collaboration than ever before. As well, the laity and many priests appreciated and supported sisters publicly. They celebrated the sisters' history of service in the Church and the current prophetic commitments to justice and to the poor. Many

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<sup>179</sup> Schneiders, *Buying the Field*, 440.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

expressed their shock at the actions of the hierarchy. Sandra Schneiders in her address to Irish religious highlighted the influence of capitalism on the hierarchy in her evaluation of the reasons for the interventions. When Cardinal Rode called for the investigations of U.S. sisters in 2009, he was asked to explain why this was happening. His answer was that he was concerned about the declining number of Religious in the U.S. and feared the same would happen in other parts of the world. The issues he named were the same as the issues that arise in corporate capitalism, and his reasons suggest a certain degree of commodification of sisters. With all of the changes in Religious Life, he feared the loss of “size, money, influence and success” in the Church. In other words, the cheap labor force around of the Church around the world would no longer exist.<sup>181</sup>

What became evident was that, through the years of renewal, women religious found a prophetic voice, and the hierarchy fails to understand the shift that has taken place. Rather than acting as a labor force for the institutional church, many sisters find themselves in marginal places among people who are suffering. As Pat Farrell indicated in her address to Irish Religious, the prophetic call of Religious life is akin to the experience of the prophet Jeremiah. The prophetic task is to give voice to the pain, suffering and sorrow of the people with whom sisters walk. This is an act of prophetic lamentation so that suffering is felt, acknowledged, and not glossed over.<sup>182</sup> In this prophetic role, women religious are primarily agents of the gospel, and then secondarily, of the institutional Church. Their task is to be faithful to the gospel as embodied in the

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<sup>181</sup> Schneiders, “Ongoing Challenge of Renewal,” 7.

<sup>182</sup> Pat Farrell, “Sustaining Transformation,” CORI, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://www.cori.ie/pat-farrells-paper-delivered-at-cori-conference-25th-april-2014-3/> (site discontinued), 2.

charism, and this leads women religious to serve on the margins, with the poor and oppressed.<sup>183</sup>

### **Conclusion**

In the above social analysis of post modernity and women religious, this chapter paints a picture of a context for the charism of conversion. The contemporary issues that have materialized from post modernity seem to lead largely to the margins where the entirety of creation, animate and inanimate alike, are struggling for quality of life. Obtaining basic human needs is a challenge for a large part of the earth's population as disparity of global wealth, political power struggles and the negative effects of climate change impinge on the ability of all beings to live. Greed, violence and breakdown of relationality contribute to diminishment of human dignity. The disconnection of human beings from the earth, from one another and, ultimately, from recognizing the Divine creates a fragmentation that calls for the charism of conversion. Franciscan conversion leads those converted to solidarity with the poor, generous sharing of goods, building up of community and recognition of the goodness of God in all. Franciscan conversion calls forth a living out of gospel values that stand in stark contrast to the values of post modernity that denigrate and oppress.

The second section of this chapter presents a social analysis of contemporary religious life. As women religious experienced the years of renewal after Vatican II, the status of the laity also shifted. Lay people began to teach in Catholic schools, minister in parishes and staff hospitals. Previously, non-ordained religious were considered second class clergy, but the outcomes of Vatican II shifted the identity of religious. In their

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 4



previous self-understanding, they had two primary purposes: 1) to be close to God and grow in holiness and 2) to provide ministry to the laity so that they could be holy. When the Vatican Council called all the baptized to holiness and participation in the Church's mission, women religious no longer had this unique self-understanding that separated them from laity. As parishes and schools became places where the laity ministered, women religious no longer had their accustomed place and role.<sup>184</sup> In the midst of these transitions, women religious found their own particular expression of gospel mission in their charisms, which has led them to ministries addressing the needs that continue to emerge in post modernity. Women religious have moved from ecclesial institutions to working with the underserved on the margins in diverse ministries where needs are pressing: both in direct service and systemic change.

Schneiders notes that women religious were probably the group most ready for renewal in the Church. She says that, "...the spiritual conversion from within the life was working in tandem with the ecclesiastical deconstruction from without to dismantle a lifestyle that had been consolidated over the past 400 years."<sup>185</sup> One might add that the deconstruction of the wider society created significant needs that called women religious to engage new ministries for the sake of the gospel. Thus, the transformation of religious life occurred during a growing understanding of laity as the people of God, as well as the deconstruction of evolving post modernity. Out of this change, the charisms of religious life were articulated and integrated by religious communities. In reality, Religious Life itself has undergone a dramatic conversion and will continue to do so as the demographic grows smaller. In this transition, women religious model what it means to be in a lifelong

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<sup>184</sup> Schneiders, "Ongoing Challenges," 2.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

process of conversion as they minister on the margins of a global society impacted by post modernity.

## **Chapter Three: Dynamics of Conversion**

### **Introduction**

As Religious Life has undergone conversion in the reclamation of founding charisms, the new approaches to initial formation in religious congregations have become experiences of conversion for new members. Whether vocational discernment leads them to final commitment or to leaving their congregations, formation still transmits the charism to those experiencing the process and provides a time of personal growth. Those whose discernment leads them to leave religious life, for the most part, leave more transformed than when they arrived and use the charism they have received to benefit the people with whom they work and serve. For Third Order Franciscans, conversion not only happens in initial formation, but it also is the primary charism that one in formation is embracing. Conversion, however, does not simply happen arbitrarily. With God's grace and openness on the part of the human person, conversion is a process that may easily be recognized in hindsight but rarely recognized as it is happening. The previous chapter described current political, economic and social ramifications for the poor and marginalized in the world. This reality calls for gospel values and conversion as a means of transformation.

This chapter will now move into a discussion of the dynamics of conversion in two areas. In the first section, the chapter explores various approaches to the theology of conversion and adult faith development. Bernard Lonergan and Donald Gelpi provide the anchor for a theology of conversion. James Fowler's decisive work in adult faith development complements the theological understanding, and David Couturier will add a contemporary Franciscan perspective. The second part of the chapter examines the

dynamics of conversion in formation of new members, particularly in the novitiate year. Understanding the theology of conversion as it manifests in the specific experience of novitiate will direct possibilities for the future of the charism in the faith lives of those who embrace it in the future.

Though no two conversion journeys are alike, we will examine this distinctive charism of conversion as a process that occurs over a lifetime. The theology of conversion supports this notion that conversion happens gradually, in stages and through grace in people and events. Bernard Lonergan's theology of conversion is grounded in the concept of self-transcendence. In the human experience of going beyond being self absorbed or self centered, one is freed to be concerned for others with generosity and authenticity. This happens in four categories that may or may not overlap: intellectual, moral, religious, and affective. Donald Gelpi, whose work grows out of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, describes conversion as a movement from being irresponsible to being responsible in some area of life. His five categories include Lonergan's categories, though he makes a distinction between personal and communal moral conversion. Gelpi emphasizes the idea of accountability for one's conversion. In other words, conversion is reflected in praxis. James Fowler's adult stages of faith development provide a framework for conversion to occur over a lifetime as a person matures. David Couturier provides a Franciscan voice to this dialogue as he brings the incarnational nature of religious conversion to the forefront.

Then we will look at ways in which the theology of conversion is manifest in the components of the initial formation experience, particularly the Third Order Regular Franciscan Common Novitiate. This section will examine the novitiate year as a

particular time of conversion and growth in novices. To do so brings the current experience of Franciscan formation into focus as the vehicle for the transmission of the charism to new members who then live it out within the congregation and in ministry. The process that fosters conversion in formation will lead to suggestions for forming the charism in those who live their faith outside of formal religious community. In offering such formation, the hope is that the grace to live Franciscan conversion will foster faith and awareness of the presence of God's goodness for building up the people of God. Exploring the dynamics of conversion will provide the foundation for moving this charism forward to meet the needs of the present and future.

### **Theology of Conversion**

#### **Conversion: Lonergan**

While conversion is intensely personal, it is not private. When conversion happens in the lives of many people, they can come together to form a community that works out the implications of the conversion. Conversion then can become historically rooted and particular as it is in the Third Order Franciscan charism and then may be similarly experienced through future generations and across cultures. When conversion is ongoing and seen as personal, communal, and historical, it manifests as a religion.<sup>186</sup> Conversion is a radical transformation that leads to interlocked changes and developments. As a process, conversion changes relationships to self, others, and God. Such changes are personal, moral, social, and intellectual. Conversion could occur either all at once in one moment or gradually over the maturing process of a lifetime, or both.

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<sup>186</sup>Bernard Lonergan, "Theology in its New Context", 13-14.

Conversion is ontic in that the one who experiences conversion understands differently, values differently, relates differently because she/he is different from before.<sup>187</sup>

Bernard Lonergan's extensive theology of conversion is a cornerstone to understanding how one experiences conversion. Lonergan says that conversion is essential to Christian life and is "a transformation of the subject and [his] world." It is a process that takes place over time, and certain meaningful moments may highlight that process. Conversion changes the path or direction of one's life in which a previous understanding of one's self and the world gives way to a new vision. As mentioned above, conversion is very personal and intimate, but it is not private because it is shared and lived out within community. Therefore, it can also pass down through generations and cross cultures, adapting to new situations and time periods.<sup>188</sup> Lonergan tells us that "[Man] achieves authenticity in self-transcendence."<sup>189</sup> While psychologists may describe the high point of adult development as self-knowledge or self-actualization, in the religious Christian person, self-transcendence is the goal of becoming more fully human. In self-transcendence, one is able to move beyond the ego or self in the experience of a relationship with God. Psychological development contributes to self-transcendence, and so does not exist in opposition to it. In religious development, Lonergan notes that a person has the capacity to question without limitations. "One can live in a world, have a horizon, just in the measure that one is not locked up in oneself. A first step towards this liberation is the sensitivity we share with the higher animals. But they are confined to a habitat, while [man] lives in a universe. Beyond sensitivity [man] asks questions, and

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>188</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 130-131.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 104.

[his] questioning is unrestricted.”<sup>190</sup> He identifies three levels of questioning that brings the human person to three corresponding levels of self-transcendence. First, one can question for intelligence in search of answers to what, why, how and what for so that one can categorize and construct a world view in the task of examining the human person in light of that world view. The second level is that of asking reflective questions in order to determine “what is so” or, in other words, what is actually accurate beyond a first look or an opinion. In the third level of self – transcendence, the questions are of a moral nature. Lonergan describes this,

“When we ask whether this or that is worthwhile, whether it is not just apparently good but truly good, then we are inquiring, not about pleasure or pain, not about comfort or ill ease, not about sensitive spontaneity, not about individual or group advantage, but about objective value. Because we can ask such questions, and answer them, and live by the answers, we can effect in our living a moral self-transcendence. That moral self-transcendence is the possibility of benevolence and beneficence, of honest collaboration and of true love, of swinging completely out of the habitat of an animal and becoming a person in human society.”<sup>191</sup>

At this level of transcendence, the human person has the capacity to act on behalf of the goodness of others. Lonergan describes this as being in love, which could mean love in a committed marriage relationship, love of others, and especially “love of God with one’s whole heart and whole soul, with all one’s mind and all one’s strength (Mk 12:30).”<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 105.

As human persons ask questions about meaning, the question of God and a relationship with God arises as basic to human questioning in the search for human fulfillment. Lonergan tells us “that fulfillment brings a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion. That fulfillment brings a radical peace, the peace the world cannot give. That fulfillment bears fruit in a love of one’s neighbor that strives mightily to bring about the kingdom of god on this earth.”<sup>193</sup> Being in love with God is an experience of love without conditions, restrictions or limitations. This being in love with God goes beyond knowing or knowledge in that it sets up a new horizon that transforms our values into God’s values that manifest in action on behalf of others. Because it goes beyond knowledge, it moves into the experience of mystery that is holy gift. It is all consuming.<sup>194</sup> Falling in love with God “dismantles and abolishes the horizon in which our knowing and choosing went on and it sets up a new horizon in which the love of God will transvalue our values and the eyes of that love will transform our knowing.”<sup>195</sup> It is an experience of consciousness that “deliberates, makes judgments of value, decides, acts responsibly and freely. But it is this consciousness as brought to fulfillment, as having undergone a conversion as possessing a basis that may be broadened and deepened and heightened and enriched but not superseded, as ready to deliberate and judge and decide and act with the easy freedom of those that do all good because they are in love. So the gift of God’s love occupies the ground.”<sup>196</sup> The grace of God’s love joined with choices and actions come together as conversion.

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 105-106.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 107.



For Christians, conversion is God's love filling and overflowing in our hearts. This happens in and through the Holy Spirit. Such overflowing (Hear Bonaventure!) is grace. Lonergan notes that from the time of Augustine, this grace has been identified in two forms. The first is operative grace, "the replacement of the heart of stone by a heart of flesh, a replacement beyond the horizon of the heart of stone."<sup>197</sup> The second is cooperative grace which takes the "heart of flesh" and moves it toward action in good works.<sup>198</sup> When one's being expands, is healed, is renewed, and is filled with God, then one has the capacity to choose and act in accordance with this transformation.

Lonergan also describes conversion using the hermeneutic of the horizon. Horizons define what is within view and what is beyond view. In terms of knowledge, different persons have different horizons depending upon their context of knowledge and interests. There are three arenas of horizons that must be taken into account. The first is a complementary horizon in which each one knows the others' horizons exist and is able to see the need for various horizons of each person as part of a whole, a community. The second is a genetic horizon. The genetic is seen in one subject whose horizons are seen in developing stages. Previous stages must occur before successive stages may happen. Finally, horizons may be dialectical or opposed in conflict. When one is faced with a horizon that is unfamiliar or contradictory to an existing horizon, this might lead either to strong rejection or significant re-direction.<sup>199</sup> The stretching or moving the boundaries of horizons lead to conversion. Lonergan cites the work of Joseph de Finance with horizontal and vertical horizons. Horizontal choices happen within a horizon that already

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 236-237.

exists, as previously described here. Vertical horizons refer to a choice to move from one horizon to another. When one makes the choice to turn in a completely different direction, the horizon also is completely different. This is the experience of conversion.<sup>200</sup>

### **Lonergan's four categories of conversion**

Lonergan articulates three types of conversion and alludes to a fourth that he doesn't fully develop.<sup>201</sup> Each is a "modality of self-transcendence." Intellectual conversion is movement toward truth from acquiring knowledge. Moral conversion is movement to values "apprehended, affirmed, and realized by a real self-transcendence." Religious conversion is movement to total being in love with the other. When all of these types occur together, sublation happens and it "introduces something new and distinct, puts everything on a new basis."<sup>202</sup>

#### **Intellectual Conversion**

Intellectual conversion is "a radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge."<sup>203</sup> The myth is misleading because it is taken at face value without the connection to its cultural meaning. In other words the empirical reality that is seen through the eyes does not take into account mediating what is seen through meaning. What is seen is not face value until interpretation occurs. Thus, "knowing accordingly is not just seeing, it is experiencing, understanding, judging, and

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>201</sup> Robert Stewart, *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation* (Berkeley, California, April 1990), 318

<sup>202</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 241.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 238.

believing.”<sup>204</sup> Each of these is needed to move beyond face value of something in order to truly know. In the attentiveness to experience, understanding, judgment and belief, the process of self-transcendence occurs when one knows beyond simply “looking.” In conversion, the consequence of this process is change in behaviors and thoughts.<sup>205</sup> For example, the way in which a child understands God is often different from that person’s understanding of God as an adult who has incorporated new knowledge and more abstract knowledge of God.

### **Moral Conversion**

Moral conversion “changes the criterion of one’s decisions and choices from satisfaction to values.”<sup>206</sup> In a general example, Lonergan notes the difference between the child and the adult. The child experiences right and wrong based on external objects, as in parents who communicate right and wrong as the authority over the child. As the child grows into an adult, she/he grows in the ability and freedom to make choices, recognizing right from wrong. In doing so she/he moves toward greater authenticity and internal personal authority.<sup>207</sup> “Then is the time for the exercise of vertical freedom and then moral conversion consists in opting for the truly good, even for value against satisfaction when value and satisfaction conflict.” Lonergan indicates that this is a continuing process in adults that demands ongoing questioning and scrutiny for the moral horizon to continue to develop.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 240.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

## **Religious Conversion**

“Religious conversion is being grasped by ultimate concern. It is total and permanent self surrender without conditions, qualifications and reservations.”<sup>209</sup>

Religious conversion is often recognized in hindsight rather than in a current single moment. It manifests in a quality of surrender, passive prayer and an acceptance of being drawn by the divine. For Lonergan, religious conversion is a gift, grace. He cites Augustine’s categories of operative and cooperative grace, explaining that operative grace is the religious conversion that changes the heart from beyond one’s horizon, an inner transformation that is gift of the divine. Cooperative grace is the way in which one lives out conversion in good works, freely performed.<sup>210</sup>

## **Affective conversion**

Affective conversion is not fully developed in Lonergan’s work.<sup>211</sup> However, he does reference the significance of human affectivity in the role of conversion. In the context of moral and religious conversion, Lonergan describes the path to affective conversion. As the human person, on the journey of conversion, moves through judgments, beliefs, and uncertainties gradually, she/he becomes a more authentic self. This journey leads to being in love with God. “But at the summit of the ascent from the initial infantile bundle of needs and clamors and gratifications, there are to be found the deep-set joy and solid peace, the power and the vigor, of being in love with God. In the measure that that summit is reached, then the supreme value is God, and the other values

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 240-241.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Robert Stewart, *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*, 31.

are God's expression of [his] love in the world, in its aspirations, and in its goal."<sup>212</sup> This falling in love with God is a mode of self-transcendence and recognizes the role of human emotions in the process of conversion.

### **Conversion: Gelpi**

Donald Gelpi uses Lonergan's categories of conversion, adds a fifth category and expands them for his use with the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, as well as the potential for ongoing conversion in those already initiated. Gelpi says that "conversion is the passage from childish, irresponsibility to the assumption of adult responsibility for some realm of experience."<sup>213</sup> Exercising responsibility in this sense is about being accountable to some person or some community of persons for one's motives, decisions, and actions. Generally, this means that actions that flow from conversion are to be behaviors that treat others as persons with real needs, taking into account how one chooses to communicate, relate, and understand the context and history of the other(s). Accepting such responsibility implies engaging in behavior that reflects solidarity, accountability, flexibility, and dialogue.<sup>214</sup> In other words, conversion is not only an interior movement but is communal as lived out in behaviors and actions that have bearing on the lives of others.

Gelpi's theology of conversion is delineated in five forms: affective, intellectual, personal moral, socio-political moral and religious. Each of them reflects his concept of conversion which defines conversion as turning from irresponsibility (or non-responsibility) toward being responsible in some aspect of lived experience. In affective

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<sup>212</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 39.

<sup>213</sup> Donald L. Gelpi, *Committed Worship: A Sacramental Theology for Converting Christians, Vol. I* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 17.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

conversion, one makes “the decision to turn from an irresponsible resistance to facing one’s disordered affectivity to the responsible cultivation of a healthy, balanced, aesthetically sensitive emotional life.”<sup>215</sup> Intellectual conversion is “the decision to turn from an irresponsible and supine acquiescence in accepted beliefs to a commitment to validation of one’s personal beliefs within adequate frames of reference and in ongoing dialogue with other seekers.”<sup>216</sup> Moral conversion is “the decision to turn from irresponsible selfishness to a commitment to measure the motives and consequences of personal choices against ethical norms and ideals that both lure the conscience to selfless choices and judge its relapses into irresponsible selfishness.”<sup>217</sup> Socio-political conversion is “the decision to turn from unreflective acceptance of the institutional violation of human rights to a commitment to collaborate with others in the reform of unjust social, economic, and political structures.”<sup>218</sup> Religious conversion is “the decision to turn from either ignorance of or opposition to God to acceptance in faith of some historical, revelatory self-communication of God and its consequences.”<sup>219</sup> In keeping with the definition of the term “metanoia,” Gelpi identifies conversion as turning away from and toward.

Gelpi identifies two areas of accountability for the converted person: personal and communal. One is first accountable to self because that which attracted and changed the self requires that one judges her/his actions accordingly. For example, in living out a moral conversion, a person is accountable to self for a given moral claim in that she/he

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 17.

commits to overcoming selfish desires to acknowledge and act on the claimed principles to which one has been converted. As a person stands up for or acts on a moral claim, so her/his conscience judges the ultimate principles that he/she claims to believe.<sup>220</sup> The communal dimension of accountability for conversion means that the one converted answers to others for her/his choices and actions. In each of Gelpi's categories of conversion, then, the one converted is accountable to the human community for one's own conduct, especially if that conduct brings suffering to others. Additionally, religious conversion means being accountable to God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Church, and the Christian community.<sup>221</sup> As a means to accountability for one's conversion, Gelpi offers the following: "Responsible people live in dialogue with those affected by their own choices. Personal conversion creates social accountability in interpersonal dealings with others. Those who experience sociopolitical conversion take responsibility for doing whatever they can to ensure that the decisions of those who shape the policies and practices of large institutions express and foster integral conversion. Sociopolitical conversion, therefore, makes one accountable to society at large."<sup>222</sup>

Gelpi further explains that conversion is a turning from and a turning toward that brings about personal transformation. In the sense that Lonergan says that conversion is self-transcendence, Gelpi argues that this personal transformation, from a Catholic perspective, is ontological in that a real, permanent shift occurs in one's being through grace.<sup>223</sup> However, Gelpi nuances his categories in two ways: natural and graced. Affective, intellectual, moral and sociopolitical conversion can happen naturally, without

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 10.

religious conversion. However, the person who is religiously converted could enter into the other four categories of conversion with the influence of faith. Faith might both inform and motivate conversion in any of the categories.<sup>224</sup> Of the interplay between the types of conversion, Gelpi says, “Every kind of conversion changes experience radically by endowing it with a new kind of selfless responsibility, but religious conversion changes experience more profoundly and radically than other forms of conversion. In every experience of conversion we transcend ourselves by becoming different and better people.<sup>225</sup> Like Lonergan, Gelpi makes clear that religious conversion is brought about by grace.<sup>226</sup> He identifies this grace as created grace. Such grace evident in the experience of conversion is “the healing, elevation, and perfection of sinfulness of human nature that the gratuitous, historical self-revelation and self-communication of God produces in the person who responds to that revelation in faith.”<sup>227</sup>

Human experiences condition and shape each other. Decisions change behavior. Behaviors shape the world. A similar dynamic is present among Gelpi’s types of conversion. The types of conversion “mutually change and condition one another within the dynamic growth of experience.”<sup>228</sup> These five forms interact with and shape each other in seven dynamic ways. The affective animate the other forms. The intellectual form orders the others. The personal moral orients the others with regard to moral claims. The religious form mediates the affective and moral forms. This mediation “transvalues” the others. The socio political form de-privatizes the others. The socio political also

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., vi.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 33.



provides norms and insights that authenticate conversion.<sup>229</sup> The complexity of these conversions occurs over a lifetime as a person grows and develops.

### **Fowler: Adult faith development and Conversion**

We now turn to the social scientist, James Fowler's work on faith development as it informs the experience of conversion. Fowler recognizes that the shift to post modernity influences how humans develop. Longer life expectancy due to medical advancements has led to an expectation of a long life in affluent countries. This lengthened life has "shifted horizons of values and possibilities that frame our reflections on a good and well-lived life."<sup>230</sup> Greater mobility has allowed wider educational opportunities abroad as well as the globalization of business and trade and more sophisticated military movement in times of war. Technology and computers allow people to interact globally. All of this reshapes the development of adults who must reframe their lives in light of these cultural shifts.<sup>231</sup> The last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of techniques for self-improvement and self-understanding. After World War II these techniques encouraged theories that promoted self-fulfillment, opening mental health and psychological growth to the middle class and ultimately formed a human potential movement.<sup>232</sup> Simultaneously, as Fowler notes, "waves of liberation movements that transformed older patterns of sexual, racial, gender, political, and religious relations" have influenced understanding of adult faith development.<sup>233</sup> Another post modern shift affecting human development theory is the human relationship to

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>230</sup> James Fowler, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian: Adult Faith Development and Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 5.

authority. Vatican II is a good example of this in that the Church's self understanding shifted away from hierarchical authority toward greater awareness of the people of God as the Church.<sup>234</sup>

Fowler defines Christian conversion as "an ongoing process...through which people (or a group) gradually bring the lived story of their lives into congruence with the core story of the Christian faith."<sup>235</sup> Thus for Fowler, conversion is not limited to a one time experience of reorienting one's life. Rather it unfolds through a series of experiences that change the convictions or beliefs once held.<sup>236</sup> Fowler further says,

Conversion means a release from the burden of self-groundedness. It means accepting, at a depth of the heart that is truly liberating, that our worth, our value, our grounding as children of God is *given* as our birthright. It means embracing the conviction that we are known, loved, supported, and invited to partnership in being with one who from all eternity intended us and who desires our love and friendship. Conversion means a recentering of our passion. It is a falling in love with the God who became like us and who invites and empowers us to a relationship like that of a parent to an adult son or daughter. It means making an attachment to the passion of Jesus the Christ—a loving, committed, and ready-to-suffer passion for the in-breaking commonwealth of love and justice. Conversion means a realignment of our affections, the restructuring of our virtues, and

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

the growth in lucidity and power of our partnership with God's work in the world.<sup>237</sup>

This explanation of conversion resonates with Lonergan's understanding of religious conversion as a falling in love with God and Gelpi's complete acceptance of God and choosing to act out of this acceptance.

In the stages of human development, Fowler notes that theorists such as Erickson and Piaget explain development as a movement of the self through time and stages that call for adaptation as a person grows and changes. Over time, the self is enriched with new abilities and greater flexibility. However, the focus is inclusive yet different in adult faith development. In Fowler's stages of adult faith development, the changes do not happen based on time, age, or social roles. Rather one experiences change in what one knows, commits to and values, particularly during experiences of inconsistency that conflict with one's existing understanding. One's comfort zone is disturbed and challenged.<sup>238</sup> Fowler says that "in this perspective, we reconstruct our ways of being in faith when we encounter disruptions or sources of dissonance in our personal or collective lives that our previous ways of making meaning cannot handle. The emergence of a new stage means the altering of previous ways of believing and understanding; it means constructing more inclusive, more internally complex, and more flexible ways of appropriating the contents – the substance and narrative power – of one's religious tradition."<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

For the purposes of initial formation of adults, we will outline stages five, six and seven of Fowler's stages of faith. Stages one through four roughly include faith development from infancy through adolescence. This is not to say that a person who enters religious life has moved from stage four, the Synthetic-Conventional stage in adolescence. However, by the time a person enters religious life today, they are likely to at least be in the Individuative-Reflective stage that usually begins in young adulthood, which has varied age ranges depending on a particular person's development. In this stage, the young adult begins to form an adult identity and makes choices about values, beliefs, and faith commitments as well in what ways they will be accountable for these choices.<sup>240</sup> The sixth stage of adult faith development, Conjunctive faith, is also likely to manifest in a new member of religious life. This stage appears most often in mid-life, and many women who discern a call to religious life have entered their midlife. In this stage, one begins to let go of the idea of perfection, becomes very aware of incongruities in patterns of behavior that have not changed thus far in adulthood and comes to awareness of the reality of death.<sup>241</sup> Other characteristics of this stage are the ability to hold polarities in tension, to see many facets of truth, to receive the symbol and myth of faith with a "second naïveté," and to be open to the truths of diverse faith communities.<sup>242</sup> The final stage of Universalizing Faith is rarely seen. In this stage, the human person grows to the point of "decentration from self" in that one is able to see the world through the eyes of those quite different from one's self. This stage impels a person to free service in keeping with profound faith values without fear or hesitation. This stage is seen in the

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 52.

lives of Ghandi, Dorothy Day, and, certainly, Francis, and perhaps in some women religious who have evolved in their vocation for decades. Universalizing faith brings the individual to a self-emptying in response to a profound awareness of divine love.<sup>243</sup>

Though each stage represents a degree of self-transcendence, this final stage is analogous to Lonergan's description that self-transcendence in which one is so in love that the self is not in the way of that love.

### **Couturier: Contemporary Franciscan Conversion**

In the introduction to his book, *The Four Conversions*, Franciscan David Couturier writes of the contemporary common understanding of conversion. He observes that many Christians mistake conversion as private with the rest of the world outside of and separate from the personal conversion experience. He describes the personal dimension of conversion as, "the most interiorized exchanges of an individual alone with the Alone."<sup>244</sup> However, from his Franciscan perspective, for Couturier conversion defines the experience in this way: "For Christians, conversion is an incarnational, fully embodied relational engagement with the Other who is God and all others who are creatures, thus brothers and sisters to one another in the love of an immensely social, Trinitarian God."<sup>245</sup> Once again, conversion is both interior and communal.

Couturier names four inter – related categories of conversion: Personal, Interpersonal, Ecclesial, and Structural. The first two are pertinent to this text. He suggests that for most people, personal conversion is a gradual process of internalization and integration that unfolds in daily choices that evolve into a pattern and ultimately a

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<sup>243</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 54-56.

<sup>244</sup> David Couturier, *The Four Conversions: A Spirituality of Transformation*, 5 .

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*,6.

lifestyle that is strengthened in prayer and sacrament.<sup>246</sup> Using the parable of the seed and the sower from Matthew 13:1-10, he describes personal conversion as the seed that becomes deeply rooted and then bears fruit into the future, even through generations.<sup>247</sup> Via the work of Luigi Rulla and his colleagues, Couturier cites the theory of self-transcendent consistency as a component of conversion that helps those who believe in the Gospel to not simply comply with the values of Christ but to internalize and live an integrated Gospel life.<sup>248</sup> Personal conversion, then, is “a process by which we, with the help of God’s grace, internalize the self transcendent values of our Christian faith. It is a process by which we recognize the dispositions of our lives (i.e. our needs and attitudes) and align them in a consistent manner with the Gospel ideals of Christ. Personal conversion is not simply the intellectual or cognitional acquiescence to a body of dogma. The truth of the Gospel must be internalized; it is not a checklist of formulae to be marked off.”<sup>249</sup> In the experience of personal conversion, Couturier identifies three categories of motivation that come into play: compliance, identification, and internalization. Compliance has to do with the rules and dogmas of faith that must be followed in order to be rewarded as one who belongs and outwardly appears obedient to the faith.<sup>250</sup> Identification is seen in those who over identify with a role as a Christian and particularly in a ministerial role and in doing so becomes rigid and self centered. “He or she identifies with the powers and privileges that the role provides. Over time the role

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.,57.

becomes the goal of the Christian life itself and not its means.”<sup>251</sup> The more authentic category of personal conversion is internalization when one “responds in love to the task at hand and with the generosity of one’s total self before God. Internalization recognizes that there are many ways to accomplish God’s will and it is ready and flexible enough meet those ways.”<sup>252</sup>

Interpersonal conversion builds on personal conversion by extending the interior world beyond the self to the relationships with those who make up one’s community. This includes family, friends, co-workers and all relationships in one’s world. In this category, Couturier uses family systems theory to describe conversion as “the psychospiritual process by which individuals and families internalize their mission as *sacramentum Trinitatis* and become the embodiment of generous and receptive love as a free communion of persons without domination or privation.”<sup>253</sup> Family systems theory names the influence that family of origin has on one’s current family and social relationships. Couturier suggests that becoming aware of family systems and the emotional dynamics that accompany the structure of family can lead to conversion, though not simply from a psychological perspective. For conversion to occur within family systems, one enters into a journey of self-awareness that requires the grace of God.<sup>254</sup>

### **Franciscan Conversion**

Conversion in Franciscan spirituality is first of all rooted in the biblical understanding of repentance. According to Elias Mallon, in the Hebrew Scriptures, the

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 84-88.

word for repentance means “to regret having done something, to be sorry, to change one’s mind, to relent to have a change of heart.”<sup>255</sup> The Hebrew Scriptures also connects the quality of mercy to moments in which God “repents” or has a change of attitude.<sup>256</sup> In the Christian Scriptures, Jesus’ call to repent is seen particularly in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, while the concept of repentance is used in Luke though not as a specific call from Jesus but rather in describing a lack of repentance in the towns where Jesus preached.<sup>257</sup> The notion of repentance does not appear at all in the gospel of John.<sup>258</sup> Mallon’s discussion of biblical repentance reflects a close relationship between repentance and conversion. Both are about a change of heart and a change of direction in one’s life and are connected to baptism. However, for him, they also are different in that the act of repenting is the initial experience of conversion. In the early Church, the repentance of baptism was understood as a one time experience that people delayed for fear of falling back into sin.<sup>259</sup> These biblical foundations of repentance are reflected in Francis’s life of penance that began with his initial conversion.

Franciscan conversion was about becoming as much like Jesus as he possibly could. Thus, the Franciscan notion of conversion is a continual turning to God and being conformed to Christ. The experience of conversion is the work of God with the cooperation of the human person. It does not happen once and for all time, rather it is ongoing, deepening, and continuously defines a person’s life. In this understanding of conversion the contemporary theology of conversion is evident. As stated in Chapter one,

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<sup>255</sup> Elias D. Mallon, “Repentance,” *Propositum: Conversion and Contemplation: Cornerstones of the Third Order Regular Franciscan Charism* 15 (May 2012): 8.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.



the Third Order Regular Rule describes conversion in three particular moments: to acknowledge God and Christ in all of the created world- humans, plants, animals, rocks, and the entire cosmos, to adore God by living the gospel prayerfully, with one's whole life and to serve God by such activities as walking with the poor, acting on behalf of justice, caring for the earth, and advocating for peace. These have potential not only to bring radical transformation to the individual but also to a community (religious or civic). For Francis, the transformation that he experienced became a "prophetic act and a disturbing presence" to the world around him.<sup>260</sup> Lobo describes conversion as a disturbing presence in this way:

Conversion is to go against the current, where the 'current' is a superficial, inconsistent and illusory lifestyle, which often makes us prisoners of moral mediocrity. With conversion, on the other hand, we are entrusted to the living and personal Gospel, which is Christ Jesus. His person is the final goal and the profound meaning of conversion. In this way conversion manifests its most splendid and fascinating face: it is not a simple moral decision to rectify our conduct of life, but a decision of faith, which involves us wholly in profound communion with the living and concrete person of Jesus. We are disturbed, displaced and destabilized in the process of conversion. It demands the total 'yes' of the one who gives his or her own existence to the Gospel, responding freely to Christ, who, first offered himself to the liberation and salvation of humanity.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Gerry Lobo, "Franciscan Prophetic Differentiation: Evangelical Conversion as Disturbing Presence," *Propositum*, 15.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

This disturbance does not happen only once in a lifetime, but over and over again. It involves risk and great flexibility.<sup>262</sup> This involves the whole person, (intellect, affect, morality, spirituality) as well as the wider community (socio-political).

The goal of initial formation in Franciscan women's congregations is to nurture this interior transformation that instills ongoing conversion as a way of life. Formation assists the novice in identifying herself as Franciscan, as one who follows in the footprints of Jesus, and in being able to live her life in a way that brings gospel values to her ministry and by extension to disturb a world in great need of those values. The novitiate attempts to give space for the kind of transformation stated by Lobo: "Wholehearted attention, heightened sense of awareness and presence to the Mystery who is present to us in each moment is the expression of a disturbing conversion. Such awareness can disturb our apathy towards evil in oneself and in others and lead us to do the right."<sup>263</sup> With this understanding, we now turn to a discussion of initial formation in women's religious communities.

### **Initial Formation of Women Religious**

#### **Revision of Initial Formation from Pre-Vatican II to Post-Vatican II**

Sandra Schneiders, who has written an extensive theology of religious life notes that "It is probably correct to say that few aspects of contemporary Religious Life have been as radically affected by the cultural and ecclesial upheaval of the past three decades as initial formation."<sup>264</sup> Before Vatican II, the initial formation programs of women religious were very similar across congregations. Candidates had similar characteristics

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<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>264</sup> Sandra Schneiders, *Selling All*, 34.

as well. Women entered in their late teens or early twenties in large groups, often right out of high schools where the sisters had taught. The young women who entered were homogenous as a group. They shared similar backgrounds in that most came from two parent families, were the same race, were good students, and were culturally steeped in Catholic tradition, morality, practice and piety of the Catholic Church. They had not experienced independence, having moved from family home to the congregation. They had little experience of cultures other than their own.<sup>265</sup> The model for formation resembled the setting of school and had rules and schedules not unlike a military culture.<sup>266</sup> Schneiders notes that,

Given these assumptions, which were quite valid at the time, formators could approach their charges as a kind of ‘class’ to be dealt with corporately most of the time. What was suitable for one was probably suitable for all, so there was little need to individualize the formation program. In fact, eradicating any tendency of the candidate toward ‘singularity’ was part of the program. Although, candidates were more or less mature adolescents rather than adults and were inexperienced in many areas of life and work, they came with a number of foundational elements in place. Most had been Catholic all their lives and knew what that meant ... Furthermore, most were very used to accepting the authority of parents and teachers and saw the formation personnel, who were always significantly older than their charges, as a kind of combination of these roles. There was a sense in which entering the convent was much like enrolling in a very strict boarding school with profession as graduation. Formation consisted of the

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 35.

curriculum and the process of transmitting it, and formation personnel as the faculty.”<sup>267</sup>

With the chaos of renewal in the 1960’s and 1970’s, this formation process became obsolete, and formation was in disorder and confusion. Those same rules and schedules that had been taught to new members were gradually dropped for all members as the renewal progressed. The changes begged the question of how new members were to be formed without the structures that had previously framed community life. Formation did not fit the new lived reality. The uncertainty and confusion led to much trial and error experimentation as well as a high turnover of formation ministers within congregations due to the stressful nature of the ministry.<sup>268</sup> Congregations struggled to provide adequate formation in a completely unfamiliar and new context. New wine could not be poured into old wineskins.

Thus, as Schneiders explains, the preconciliar understanding of formation shifted in the wake of collapsed structures. In light of the transition described in the previous paragraph, confusion was evident in three particular areas: the number of entrants declined, a theological uncertainty amid change ensued, and the understanding of the word ‘formation’ was in question. About the decline in numbers, Schneiders says, “The sudden decline in the number of entrants into ministerial congregations, in many cases from forty to one hundred or more a year to one or two, with some years in which there were none, radically affected the model of formation and thus every element of the process.”<sup>269</sup> In addition the one or two who entered were very different from those who

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 36.

went from their parents' homes to the convent in the previous era. The new candidates were women shaped by the cultural changes of the 1960's and '70's. They were likely older, perhaps previously married and were sexually experienced. They were mature as they had been financially independent professionals who were not accustomed to being supervised by another adult. Some had little experience of Catholic faith and practice and thus had minimal knowledge of faith tradition and practice.<sup>270</sup> Since the old model of formation was no longer appropriate for these candidates, the program had to be individualized to each person's needs because even if two or more candidates entered together, their life experiences were likely very different. At times conflicts arose because the candidates and the formators were close in age, and because there were no longer large classes to share and diffuse strong feelings of fear or anger. Schneiders describes the reality, "Candidates and formators thus often became locked into highly personalized conflicts that had as much to do with personality and diversity of experience as with vocational growth, and the asymmetry of power and authority between people often close in age exacerbated the situation."<sup>271</sup>

Schneiders explains that a shifting understanding of the theology of religious life contributed to the chaos of reshaping formation programs. Congregations were in a time of experimentation. Professed sisters were testing different models of community life, new prayer forms and spirituality, different ministries, dress, and degrees of independence. Formation ministers were no longer clear about the goals of the formation process. Schneiders poses some of the questions that formation ministers were asking, "Was the novitiate to produce a psychologically well-adjusted individual who would be

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

capable of figuring out for herself what it meant to be a Religious? Or a committed community member whose primary loyalty was to the group whatever she might believe about Religious Life? Or a deeply spiritual person who would pray and discern her way to maturity as a Religious? Or a theologically well-grounded minister? Or some combination of these?”<sup>272</sup> Because of the ongoing changes, experimentation and general chaos, the formation ministers often received contradictory answers or directives both from leadership and members, especially since those in formation were no longer separated from the professed sisters nor isolated from the rest of the world. Theology of Religious Life was in flux, and in the chaos, formation programs were revised every two to three years as formation personnel turned over.<sup>273</sup>

Schneider’s third area of concern as the old style of formation gave way to the new was in the word ‘formation’ itself. Vatican II renewal asserted the understanding that the call to this vocation grew out of baptism, shared by all of the people of God. This caused women religious to let go of the pre-Vatican II notion that sisters lived a way of life superior to other ways of living out baptism. Sisters thus began to question why any formation other than living and working in the community was even needed. Some had an aversion to the idea that one person could be “formed” by another, especially since women were coming to religious life with maturity and life experiences. Those professed sisters who had negative experiences of their own formation as coercive and oppressive, were particularly attuned to the idea that an adult being “formed” was both disrespectful

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<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

and absurd.<sup>274</sup> These struggles ultimately led to a more balanced approach in forming new members to live in the new vision of Vatican II renewal.

### **General Overview of the Initial Formation Process Today**

Initial formation is the period that begins when a woman discerns that she will enter an institute and ends when she makes a final profession of vows, with the understanding that formation continues throughout life. Formation programs attempt to balance the individual needs of the discerner with her incorporation into communal life of the institute. The length of initial formation could be a period of nine years depending on the discernment of the individual.<sup>275</sup> The Code of Canon Law provides general guidelines for the formation process within all religious institutes. Major Superiors have the responsibility of making sure that formation is carried out with new members, and she does so by appointing formation personnel.<sup>276</sup> Canon Law also calls for admitting those who “are healthy, have a suitable disposition, and have sufficient maturity to undertake the life which is proper to the institute.”<sup>277</sup> Communities often use an extensive interview process as well as psychological testing as a way of gathering information about the applicant before entrance in order to evaluate her suitability for religious life. When a woman enters, the initial formation process begins. The incorporation of new members occurs gradually in deepening stages of membership. The first stage is candidacy (formerly postulancy). The candidate lives and works with the community, experiencing communal prayer, ministry, meals, and household responsibilities. She may meet with her formation minister for one-on-one mentoring as well as classes that introduce the

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>276</sup> Code of Canon, 647.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 642.

candidate to community history, vows, and community living skills. The candidacy period may be one or two years depending on the needs of the candidate. Some congregations have found the two year candidacy period to be particularly helpful. The Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque have a guideline that candidacy is usually a two year period of time. This allows the new member to experience the challenges of transition, not unlike a mild case of culture shock as she encounters this new sub culture for the first time. In the second year of candidacy, the entrant has the opportunity to live religious life and in a sense to try it out with more ease without the burden of constant encounter with the new and unfamiliar.<sup>278</sup>

At the end of candidacy, the woman discerns her readiness for novitiate. If she and the congregation mutually discern that she is ready to continue her formation in the congregation, she enters her canonical novitiate year. The quote from Canon Law used in chapter 1 bears repeating here: Can. 646 “The purpose of the novitiate, by which life in an institute begins, is to give the novices a greater understanding of their divine vocation, and of their vocation to that institute. During the novitiate the novices are to experience the manner of life of the institute and form their minds and hearts in its spirit. At the same time their resolution and suitability are to be tested.”<sup>279</sup> While the language is legalistic, the intent that congregations can surmise is that the novitiate year be a time for the novice to be steeped in the life of the community. The structure of the novitiate is such that the environment for prayer and reflection gives adequate time for the novice to internalize the charism of her congregation so that she may clearly discern her vocation. Though this is a difficult year, it is often referred to as a year of favor and one that has opportunities

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<sup>278</sup> Dubuque Franciscans, *Mutual Covenant for Formation*, 2009, 4.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, #646.



and resources that are rarely found in other vocations. During this year, the novice deepens her prayer life, studies and reflects on the three vows, performs a few hours of volunteer ministry, and builds skills for living healthy community life. The novice meets weekly with her formation minister for ongoing dialogue and discernment. At the end of the canonical novitiate and after further discernment, the novice enters a second year of novitiate which may include apostolic ministry or further theological study. As the second year of novitiate concludes, the novice discerns her readiness for first vows/temporary profession. If the discernment leads her to first vows, she professes vows for two or three years and returns to ministry and new experiences of community life. As discernment continues, she renews her vows and when ready discerns for final profession.

### **Practices of Contemporary Novitiate Formation**

This canonical novitiate year is the core formative experience for any formation program, especially with regard to conversion. Novitiate provides space for discernment and assimilation of one's identity as a religious. A novice may have limited participation in ministry while taking time for learning and integrating the various components of the process. The goal is to respond to the call to spend one's life for the sake of others. The Religious Formation Conference Manual notes that the process of incorporation includes "academic, pastoral, spiritual, ministerial and communal elements."<sup>280</sup> Congregations create their own unique programs structured around the charism, traditions and lived experience of their specific congregational cultures. Novitiate programs may look different from one congregation to another yet have broader categories of formation in

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<sup>280</sup> *Religious Formation Conference: Resource Manual*, (Religious Formation Conference, 2004), 17.

common. The Religious Formation Conference (RFC) identifies five inter-related elements that are foundational to a novitiate experience. These are attention to one's inner life, to interpersonal relationships, to institutional relationships, societal relationships and one's place in the universe.<sup>281</sup> RFC then proposes that these issues be addressed in a curriculum in three formative areas: Catechetical Preparation, Preparation for Ecclesial Presence and Ministry, and Preparation for Communal Living.<sup>282</sup> During this year of study and prayer, the novice attends to these categories in the context of prayer. This in turn prompts conversion on all levels.

### **Catechetical Preparation**

As a potential new member enters into formation, the assumption is that the person is oriented toward a Roman Catholic identity (usually confirmed in the application process). In other words, the potential new member shows that she is an active member of a faith community with some knowledge of Catholic practices and teaching. Usually, certificates of baptism and confirmation are required and as well as proof of nullification of marriage when appropriate. The initial formation process would continue ecclesial faith formation, "while deepening basic teaching in scripture, doctrine, morality, Church history, spirituality, prayer and social justice."<sup>283</sup> Novitiate, then, provides the time and space for the new member to deepen and integrate these topics. The learning and integration may come from a variety of resources. Novices may participate in a local faith community, engage in regular spiritual direction, study in lay ministry programs, provide volunteer ministry outside the congregation on a limited basis or receive faith formation

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

within the culture of their own congregation.<sup>284</sup> Catechetical preparation equips new religious with an understanding of the various dimensions of the Church as well as clarifying personal and communal attitudes about Church.

### **Preparation for Ecclesial Presence and Ministry**

The role of a woman religious is to serve in ministry in the Church and the world and this requires intense preparation. The preparation for ministry assumes that the new member has the capacity to grow in theological understanding and reflection. Formation, then, has the goal of teaching theological content as well as pastoral skills needed for both ministry and community. Unlike the pre-Vatican II period of formation, programming for building these skills is not uniform for all. Formation programs must develop their processes to meet new members where they are for the sake of that person's growth and transformation.<sup>285</sup> RFC outlines the areas of study that help prepare the new member for ministry. Some of these are Scripture, a variety of theologies (i.e. Liberation, Feminist, and Eco-theology), Church History, Sacraments, Catholic Social Teaching and Spirituality. At the same time, skill development areas are also suggested such as Leadership skills, Ethics, and Canon Law. The novice, then, has the opportunity to grow in knowledge and skill in preparation for ministry.

### **Preparation for Communal Living**

Living well in communities of adults requires maturity and skill. In fact, one may be well versed in the catechetical aspects of Church and become a well prepared minister and never live in a religious community. Therefore, this category of preparation gets at the heart of the call to live as a religious. New members come to community with various

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 18.

levels of maturity and life skills.<sup>286</sup> Again, the best practice in shaping a process for the one in formation is to accept new members where they are in their development.

Components of this area of preparation are varied. RFC suggests that the novice study all aspects of Religious life: History of Religious Life, History of her congregation, and canonical vows. In addition to the history of the local congregation, the novice needs to study the documents of the congregation such as the constitutions, rule, and membership responsibilities so that she may integrate the charism and mission of her institute.

Learning the skills of community life is critical: communication skills, conflict resolution, ability to self-reflect, interpersonal skills, and living with wide diversity. For community life skills to be healthy, the novice is asked to attend to her physical and psychological health, her spiritual life and leisure working toward a balanced life.<sup>287</sup> As she integrates the skills and self-care needed for community living, she discerns her call to religious life.

### **Contemporary Practices of the Franciscan Common Novitiate**

The Third Order Regular Franciscan Common Novitiate (TOR-FCN) established twenty years ago, was most recently located in St. Louis, Missouri. With a current membership of twenty-one congregations nationwide, the TOR-FCN provides the opportunity for peers to experience formation together when they would otherwise likely be alone or with one other person. The collaboration of congregations also allows for the sharing of formation personnel and resources for the benefit of the charism. The organization maintains canonical approval and currently is governed by a leadership team chosen by the membership. The mission of the TOR-FCN includes the following:

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, 19.

As Third Order Regular Franciscans with a passionate desire to live the Gospel according to the spirit of Francis and Clare of Assisi, the sisters and brothers of the Third Order Regular commit to a partnership of interdependence in welcoming new members who wish to live an evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of contemplation, poverty, and minority.

As ecclesial persons, we seek to fulfill the purpose of the novitiate according to the universal law for the Institute of Consecrated Life and the particular law, the Constitutions of each participating congregation.

The novitiate is a time of deepening the contemplative spirit, of developing one's single-hearted love of God, of fostering a joyful and energetic spirit of service to God's little ones as brothers and sisters, and a time of continuing discernment to the vowed life.

It provides a rootedness in the common tradition of the Third Order Regular Franciscan family and relates organically to the varied charismatic expressions manifested by the participating congregations.<sup>288</sup>

Just as Congregational Constitutions guide the life of any given religious institute, the TOR-FCN constitutions give specific guidance to the member congregations, providing directives for governance, roles and responsibilities, as well as general guidelines for the novitiate program itself.

The components of the TOR-FCN are inclusive of the curriculum guidelines recommended by the RFC Manual. Particular to the TOR-FCN, the novitiate provides space and resources for a novice to enter into the charism of conversion that supports

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<sup>288</sup> “Third Order Regular Franciscan Common Novitiate Constitutions,” 2009, 2.

discernment of the novice's call to live as a Franciscan woman religious. The year includes two semester academic courses that explore the history of Religious Life and Contemporary issues of Religious Life. Once a week, the novices attend an Inter-congregational Novitiate (ICN) program with women and men from diverse congregations, charisms and cultures. Though most are daylong workshops, there are some multiple day workshops. The workshops address topics particular to Religious Life, Ecclesiology and healthy community living. The novices receive input while having an opportunity to relate to peers. For the Franciscan component of the TOR-FCN, each month, Franciscan women scholars come into the novitiate to teach two day intensive courses on selected Franciscan topics.

### **Conversion in the TOR-FCN**

The subject matter presented to the novices in these classes and workshops are the impetus for Lonergan's and Gelpi's categories of intellectual conversion. As the novice learns the particulars of Religious Life and the Franciscan charism, she has the opportunity to incorporate her knowledge into lived experience in novitiate community life. In Lonergan's terms if she takes in the content presented to her, then understands and experiences it, then judges and believes it fits who she is becoming, then she has experienced conversion. In Gelpi's intellectual conversion, she has learned new content that calls her to be responsible for making it a part of her life. As she gains knowledge pertaining to her identity as a woman religious, she is able to reflect on it such a way as to discern whether or not it resonates with her perceived call to this vocation.

Simultaneously, the novice is living in community with other novices and professed sisters. The intense experience of the novitiate community becomes a

laboratory for learning about oneself, healthy communication and boundaries, and negotiating conflict in the effort to live healthy community life. This aspect of novitiate is one in which a woman is invited to see herself honestly and authentically as she “rubs elbows” with her sisters in common life. In the “elbow rubbing” she is called to her own moral conversion as she sees herself in these often challenging relationships. She has the opportunity to see and accept her own human condition, including both gifts and challenges for community living, while learning to accept others in their human condition. The question continually asked is: how do we live together well amidst our differences and human foibles? It is this experience of common life, women living in a group that they did not personally choose, that the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience become concrete and integrate with the academic knowledge they engage in their classes. They meet the vow of poverty as the members of the house negotiate living simply together, using resources, sharing cars, and sharing the household tasks, as well as in the encounter with the self. They experience the vow of chastity as they sort out their relationships with each other, in ministry, and with those beyond the walls of the novitiate house. They encounter the vow of obedience in the tensions that emerge among dependence, independence and interdependence. The broad question that addresses Lonergan’s moral conversion and Gelpi’s personal moral conversion is how does one live in right relationship? How does one face personal shortcomings, ingrained habits or outright faults and make changes that support right relationships, not only in one’s community group but beyond as well.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter presents theological dynamics of conversion and Franciscan novitiate formation as a model for the experience of conversion. From the discussion above, we see that Lonergan and Gelpi articulate similar categories of conversion in their theologies. However, Gelpi provides two categories more than Lonergan. In doing so, he separates individual conversion from communal conversion (socio-political moral), a helpful distinction when considering the fragmentation of contemporary life in need of communal relationships. They also describe conversion in categories that may stand alone. For example, one may experience moral or intellectual conversion individually without connections to a specific community or even a relationship with God. However, each of their categories likely overlaps with or influences each other. Both Lonergan and Gelpi name religious conversion as one of their categories, but they also leave room for conversion to occur without connection to religion. That being said, this is study that is focused on religious conversion in the sense that one's relationships with God and others are intertwined in the experience of ongoing conversion. As per Couturier, the Incarnation and Trinitarian theology are key concepts for a Franciscan understanding of conversion as they point to the importance of relationships and unity. This will be evident more so in the next chapter through our study of Francis' life and Bonaventure's work.

James Fowler's stages of adult faith have bearing on the work of Lonergan and Gelpi. For each of them, religious conversion can be a process that happens when a person simultaneously gains greater knowledge, chooses to act in



accordance with moral values and grows into a more intimate relationship with God and others. Seen in Fowler's stages of faith development, the person who begins to form an adult identity embraces consistent values, beliefs, and faith commitments and is accountable to themselves and others. As a person experiences times of conversion, she/he has the potential to move through stages that eventually can lead to self-transcendence. The ego becomes less prominent while goodness and generosity of heart are expressed in actions. These dimensions of conversion are compatible with the Franciscan notion of conversion from the Third Order Rule. In the three moments of acknowledging, adoring and serving God, one has some knowledge of God and the world (intellect), adores God (falls in love) and serves God (makes moral choices in keeping with the divine relationship). This is a process that repeats itself, not in identical isolated moments, but certainly through the personal and communal relationships that develop through a lifetime. Such conversion is evident in Francis continually turning to God and choosing to be conformed to Christ throughout his life.

The experience of conversion in Franciscan novitiate formation is an effort to provide an environment in which new members integrate the Third Order charism as their way of life. They take in new information intellectually, use the information to examine their lives reflectively in the context of faith and gradually deepen their identity as a Franciscan sister. Shaped by the integration of information, the new members' religious and moral growth guides choices for how they give their lives for the sake of others. These moments of conversion

often take place in the context of the Individuative-reflective stage of Fowler's categories of faith development. In this stage, new members are ready to examine their beliefs and to grow in faith in order to make choices about how they are called to live their lives. In Franciscan formation, new members discover how their identities resonate with Francis's distinct way of following in the footprints of Jesus. In turn, they are able to live their lives in ways that bring gospel values to ministry and by extension to a world in great need of those values. The charism of conversion lays an ethical claim on their lives, is sustained by their relationship with God, and is embraced in the present and in the future.

This chapter represents the first part of theological reflection on the charism of conversion in the pastoral circle, and it does have limitations. The study presented in this chapter makes no distinctions between conversion based on gender, culture, race, or class. The theologies represented here do seem to assume Christianity in the category of religious conversion. This raises the question of how religious conversion is or isn't experienced in other world religions. Post modernity in all of its diversity would benefit from a better understanding of conversion beyond the western definitions of conversion. This is beyond the scope of the present study. The basic dynamics of conversion presented here are a starting point for Franciscan conversion. It is normative for the future in that it is open and inclusive for anyone who wishes to embrace it and it puts an ethical demand on the one converted. Moral and ethical actions rooted in Christianity have the purpose of building up the present and future reign of God. Also, an individual does not "make" conversion happen for oneself or for

another. Both Lonergan and Gelpi identify grace and the Holy Spirit as integral to the experience of conversion. The resources and environments for conversion may be provided, but without a pneumatological element, religious conversion is not likely to happen. This activity of the Holy Spirit is the God energy that draws humanity to a future full of hope

## Chapter Four: Sources for Franciscan Conversion: Francis and Bonaventure

### Introduction

The previous chapter provided theological reflection on conversion as well as an analysis of formation as a vehicle for conversion. The second part of theological reflection now turns to the sources of Franciscan conversion. Conversion as the Third Order Regular charism has been articulated in more recent Franciscan scholarship. For the Franciscan family, one result of the Vatican II mandate for religious institutes to return to their founding charisms was a recovery of the source materials that are at the core of Franciscan life. In 1999 and the years following, three volumes of primary sources were published. These volumes replaced the 1973 publication *St. Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources* which had served as the principal Franciscan source in English for more than two decades. After its publication, scholars began to research, write and make widely available primary sources that had rarely, if ever, been used by Franciscans. Kajetan Esser, who had researched libraries in Europe, published a scholarly edition of Francis's writings. Lorenzo di Fonzo, Theophile Desbonnets, Rosalind Brooke and Marino Bigaroni researched the lives of Francis's followers. Georges Maillieux and Jean-Francois Godet began a collection of Franciscan sources that were computerized.<sup>289</sup> According to the introduction to the first volume of primary sources, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents: the Saint*, "the Omnibus was clearly outdated and needed to be re-done in light of contemporary scholarship."<sup>290</sup>

New, accessible scholarship in Franciscan studies led to greater understanding of Francis as the founder of the Franciscan movement, further development of Franciscan

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<sup>289</sup> Regis Armstrong et al, ed., *Such is the Power of Love*, 11.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

spirituality, and especially an articulation of the various characteristics of the Franciscan charism and values within the Franciscan family. These works, some of them available in English for the first time, have helped form a Franciscan sensibility that is evident in the lives of those who follow Christ with Francis and Clare as their models. Contemporary Franciscans enjoy a deepening integration of the charism of conversion in their personal and communal lives. The editors of Volume I state in the introduction, “It would seem appropriate for Francis’s own writings to be the most valuable source for discovering him. This is certainly true at the close of the twentieth century for no generation has had the same access to his writings as the present.”<sup>291</sup>

Drawing from this rich renewal of Franciscan scholarship, this chapter will articulate the early foundations for Franciscan conversion and its relevance for today. The first section will look at Francis’ social location by examining the political, economic and religious world view of the Middle Ages and its similarities to post modernity. Then, we will take a deeper look at Francis’s own experiences of conversion. The events of his life that led him to found a movement appear to be profoundly uncomplicated. His simple approach to faith led him to deeper conversion as his understanding of the gospel met the situations of his context. Following Francis’ conversion, the chapter then examines the way in which Bonaventure expressed his understanding of that conversion in *Soul’s Journey into God*. Finally, the chapter explores the intersections between aspects of contemporary theology of conversion and Franciscan conversion in *Soul’s Journey into God*. In relating the core understanding of Franciscan conversion to a contemporary

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.,13.

understanding of conversion, it is possible to retrieve Franciscan conversion for post modernity.

## **Medieval Context of Francis**

### **General overview**

The Middle Ages span the years c. 500-c.1550, roughly the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>292</sup> Society was structured largely around feudalism that eventually gave way to a merchant based economy. Francis is born almost in the center of this period, the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The Roman Empire was on the decline in the Western world by the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and the Church became the authority rather than the empire. Canon law took the place of Roman law, and Crusaders took the place of soldiers in the outlying border areas.<sup>293</sup> Consequently, the Papacy became a source of some unity in the shadow of the Empire, and, as a governing entity, was at its peak effectiveness in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, about the time of Francis.<sup>294</sup> R.W. Southern names this Church-State governance as a defining characteristic of the Middle Ages. “Church and society were one, and neither could be changed without the other undergoing a similar transformation.”<sup>295</sup> Thus the medieval church functioned also as the state in that it provided the structures of governance including laws, courts, and taxes as well as power over life and death. Even though political power resided in the Church, two characteristics of the Church-State were significant. The first was that the agents of the Church had somewhat limited power because geographical distances were too wide for cohesive power. The second was that

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<sup>292</sup> R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church of the Middle Ages* (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 16.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

the power of the Church-State could not be regulated by an entity such as a police force because no such entity existed.<sup>296</sup>

However, even though the Church was the main governing authority, it was much more than an organizing, ruling government. The Church simultaneously provided people with a sense of their place in God's universe, was a source of learning and education for the common good, and ultimately was the guide for salvation.<sup>297</sup> In theory, only those who were "orthodox and obedient believers could enjoy the full rights of the citizenship."<sup>298</sup> Those who were not believers in Christ were considered outsiders and had limited or no rights within the Church-State. Jews, as non-believers, had very specific rules which both restricted and protected them. They could not spread their Jewish faith, yet they could not be compelled to convert to Christianity. Their children could not be taken from them to be raised as Christian. Though they were scorned as the people who crucified Jesus, they were largely left alone in western Europe.<sup>299</sup> On the other hand, those Christians who fell away from the faith basically had no right to exist and, as heretics, were killed. Thus, to live in this Church-State society, Christianity was compulsory.<sup>300</sup>

Another prominent characteristic of this period was the role of saintly relics in the life of the Church-State. While the material world was deemed spiritually inferior, a relic was a material object that allowed a window into the divine or supernatural. These relics tangibly symbolize divine safety and even compensated for the gaps in power of the local

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 18-21.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

leaders because of their connection to the divine. They provided a sense of the holy in the midst of violence or powerlessness, contributed economically to the place that retained ownership of the relics and the saint whose relic resided in a town or area provided safety to the people who claimed the saint. As people's immediate world situation constantly changed, relics reminded them of the eternal world of the divine on which they could rely.<sup>301</sup> "In all that [men] did, whether in secular, ceremonial or liturgy or building, they aimed at producing an image of an eternal world within a world of change."<sup>302</sup> In this feudal Church-State of the Middle Ages, relics and the tenets of faith to some degree contributed to the idea of a universal society in a Divine Universe that was ordered and constant.<sup>303</sup>

### **Wars and Skirmishes-Militarism and Knighthood**

Though the merging of the Church and State stabilized society to some degree, the medieval world of Italy was not entirely peaceful. The Middle Ages was marked by violence, war, and skirmishes between towns and principalities whose loyalties were either with the Roman government or with the Pope. The acquisition of land and power was at stake in these ongoing conflicts. Fortini describes the chaos and destruction:

Centuries of devastation upon devastation, ruin atop ruin. The ancient temples, the arches, the baths, the villas, collapse. The city falls into squalor and sepulchral silence. It seems that the future can hold nothing but death; and in the sleepless nights of the frightened survivors, the words of the Evangelist flame amid monstrous comets and ominous signs: "When the thousand years are over,

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 29-33.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., 22.



Satan will be released from his prison...” As the year 1000 approaches, terror of the forthcoming dissolution of the world echoes in assemblies, in sermons, even in the formulae of the notarial acts - *Appropinquante fine mundi* (“at the approach of the end of the world”).<sup>304</sup>

Conflicts led to conquerors who then became local rulers establishing castles that were spread across the countryside, each their own fortress for protection. At the time of Francis, Mount Subasio, where Assisi is located, was covered with castles of local feudal lords.<sup>305</sup> Feudalism had shifted society to an agrarian way of life in which two classes of people, the nobility and military who served the Emperor and/or the Pope and the people who served the nobility as their subjects. War was a standard part of life as a reflection of “strength, the law, revenge, a duty of honor.”<sup>306</sup> Along with the conflicts, knighthood and chivalry contributed to violence as nobility sought honor in crusades against non-Christians. In the structure of chivalry of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, nobles were made knights in religious ceremony. They were virtuous nobles who fought from a horse with armor and arms. Their function was similar to monasticism of the period, to “combat against ‘infidels’ and protection of religious pilgrims, and ... commitments that involved the taking of vows and submitting to a regulation of activities.”<sup>307</sup>

## **Economics**

Economically, war led to most people being enslaved by their lords so that they could have both sustenance and protection. Otherwise as free farmers, they would have

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<sup>304</sup> Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, p.12.

<sup>305</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>307</sup> “Medieval Chivalry” from Education Reference Desk, accessed January 7, 2017, <http://www.eduref.net/kct/medieval-chivalry/>.

been constantly vulnerable to attacks and disruption of their farming. They became serfs, with their lives, property and families dependent on their feudal lords whose decisions were often unpredictable.<sup>308</sup> The division of classes within the system was very clear and rarely could a serf become completely free. Eventually, the agrarian way of life moved to a merchant based economy. As the economic focus shifted to trade of goods, the power and land holdings of the feudal lords diminished and shifted to the merchants whose goal was profit. Fortini describes the shift: “In this new millennium all Italian cities have been seized by a mania for trade, by land and by sea, with the east and the west. The seigniorial estates decay as the merchants assert their supremacy, a supremacy based on money. They constitute a new and heterogeneous class, turbulent, very much occupied with buying and selling, jealous, vain, fractious. In importance it is a class rivalling that of feudal lords.”<sup>309</sup> The lords and warriors were at odds with the merchants, struggling for power. Eventually the merchants took over the governance and administration of the people.<sup>310</sup> As the merchant economy became more established, the merchants gained greater political power. With a clear focus on profit, the medieval version of capitalism (mercantilism) thus emerged.

The shift to a merchant based economy is described by R.W. Southern. He identifies the years c.1050-c.1300 as a time of great change and growth in the Middle Ages, though the years immediately preceding did not seem to foreshadow that such a dramatic change was going to happen. During this age of growth, the Pope’s power over

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<sup>308</sup> Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, p. 28.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p.38.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*

the secular leaders was solidified and European expansion was underway.<sup>311</sup> Economic development began to grow rapidly due to a combination of circumstances including “a growing accumulation of capital, rising population, the return of the Mediterranean to Western control, the political decline of the Greek and Moslem empires” which opened greater opportunities.<sup>312</sup> Southern further describes the progress of this period:

When it had once started the expansion became irresistible. Increasing rewards encouraged the settlement of waste lands, the improvement of rivers, roads, and canals, the introduction of new methods of farming, the organization of markets and credit. All over northern Europe we find new villages where previously there had been only waste-land. The contraction of urban population, which had marked the end of the Roman Empire and remained a feature of the first period of medieval history, was now decisively reversed. Colonization began on all the frontiers of western Europe, and with colonization there began the familiar process of military aggression. For the first time in its history, western Europe became an area of surplus population and surplus productivity, and it developed all the assertive and aggressive tendencies of a rapidly developing and self confident community...For two centuries after 1100 the West was in the grip of an urge for power and mastery to which there appeared no obvious limit.<sup>313</sup>

In a time when merchants formed trade and craft guilds that served as a sort of labor union that protected trade secrets, the Church hierarchy was likely one of the most

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<sup>311</sup> R.W. Southern, *Western Society and Church*, 34.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*,35.

powerful guilds with its own laws, courts, and criteria for belonging. As Southern states, “one may say that the medieval ecclesiastical hierarchy was a trade unionist’s paradise.”<sup>314</sup> Ecclesial law guided secular life. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Church didn’t see trade as compatible with Christianity. However, by the time of Francis, canon law allowed commercial trade and any laws upsetting the economy were ignored.<sup>315</sup>

### **Religion and Church**

As stated above, the Church was central government and integral to economics of the Middle Ages. This was true to the degree that it could function as such. Kings still reigned but were lowered from their previous elevated status. In many places bishops became feudal lords who maintained jurisdiction in their cities. During the age of growth (1050-1300), the papacy stabilized as the government of the Roman Empire with the “constructive period of papal government” occurring 1123-1312.<sup>316</sup> Medieval rulers embodied two important political characteristics: bestowing benefits and doling out justice. A ruler who generously gave benefits to his subjects received their loyalty in return. When, through justice, crimes were punished, the resources gained in the punishment could be given to the loyal subjects:

To be able to give was the first law of political life, and there was a close connexion (sic) between this and the most important function of medieval government, the dispensing of justice. If the distribution of benefits was essential to the survival of a government, the dispensing of justice was necessary for the growth of its influence. There were several reasons for this. In the first place, the

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>315</sup> Donald F. Logan, *The History of the Church*, 40.

<sup>316</sup> R.W. Southern, *Western Society and Church*, 108.

dispensing of justice vastly enlarged the gifts that a ruler could give; indeed it was the source of most of them. The punishments of the evil-doer provided the rewards of the well-doer; and he who dealt out the punishments to his enemies could also remit them for his friends. The records of governments are full of such remissions and reward for friends drawn from the deep well of judicial supremacy. These reward and remissions kept the wheels of government turning and the timing of them was a main part of the art of government.<sup>317</sup>

This system was in place both in the Holy Roman Empire and in the Church. Papal benefits may be seen in the relationship between the pope and monasteries. Monasteries would give generously to the pope, and in return, the pope would give privileges and amenities to the monasteries, setting up a degree of loyalty and obedience to the pope.<sup>318</sup>

The development of papal power grew in papal dispensation of justice in which the papal court became the standard for justice. Society became very litigious and went to the Church for justice. The papal court made rules and laws for clergy and laity.

This flow of business had one great positive result. It was responsible for tidying up large areas of ordinary life. The papal court protected parish priests against eviction and gave them a minimum income that could not easily be plundered; it gave laymen a discipline that was clear-cut and not very onerous; it laid down rules and conditions for all the main occasions and areas of Christian life—baptism, confirmation, confession, communion, penance, marriage, religious instruction and religious duties, alms, usury, last wills and testaments, the last rites, burial, graveyards, prayers and masses for the dead. With similar clarity and

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 114.

completeness it dealt with all the incidents of clerical life—dress, education, ordination, duties, status, crimes and punishments.<sup>319</sup>

During this period, the popes brought order to a society that was growing and changing quickly. By adding the stability of law, the popes could claim the primacy of the Church in the West. With the rapid changes, the Church did not have to seek out this status. Disputes came to them, and laws were made accordingly.<sup>320</sup>

However, this did not eliminate tensions between the Church and the State. Fortini describes the range of Church authority over their subjects in the bull of 1198, “We forbid any authority or representative of such authority to exact undue levies or to bring to trial the clergymen of your churches or the men who live on the lands of the episcopacy, without the consent of the Bishop.”<sup>321</sup> Yet, as stated above, accountability to Church authority was difficult because they had no consistent means of enforcement. They only had two forms of accountability: interdict and excommunication. Of these, Southern says, “These weapons might have been effective if they had commanded unanimous respect and obedience, but they did not. In minor disputes, they sometimes worked; but in major ones they did not work at all, or they unleashed a flood of self-interested violence which destroyed everything within reach...”<sup>322</sup> Thus, the popes did not have total power over the secular rulers because they could not hold them accountable. Cities and towns were frequently at odds based on loyalties. Imperial cities clashed with papal cities for power.

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>321</sup> Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, 27.

<sup>322</sup> R.W. Southern, *Western Society and Church*, 125

Another aspect of the Church-State relationship was that in the transition to a trade based economy, the Church was not addressing the social problems that emerged in cities where trade was carried out, as described by Southern, “But what was to be made of the towns-anarchic, engaged in pursuits doubtfully permissible in canon law, embracing extremes of wealth and destitution, subject to over employment and unemployment, quite different from anything known in the rural community? To such a society, the ecclesiastical organization had not yet and perhaps never has adapted itself.”<sup>323</sup> Poverty, unemployment, and violence prevailed. Some of this “hysteria” took the form of people publicly flagellating themselves in anticipation of the end of the world. They walked through the streets beating themselves with leather straps.<sup>324</sup>

This excessive hysteria was one of many responses to the Church in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The laity at this time had no sense that they participated in the common good, received protection or contributed to unity. They had no power. Clergy, however, were exempt from regular justice and taxes. There was no interference with the hierarchy.<sup>325</sup>

Pope Innocent III was in the papacy during part of Francis’s life. Under him, two major movements shaped the Church: doctrinal dissent and the emergence of new religious orders. These emerged from a laity disturbed by the growing affluence of the Church seen outwardly in lavish silk vestments and gold fixtures. They questioned the authenticity of clerics who were living with such privilege, and they longed for ways to live more credible Christian lives.<sup>326</sup> From this, groups of reformers took it upon

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<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 274-275.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>326</sup> Donald F. Logan, *The History of the Church*, 202

themselves to look for ways to follow Christ, and many of them were deemed heretical. The two most notable are the Waldensians and the Cathars.

The Waldensians followed Peter Waldes, a wealthy merchant of Lyon who, after providing for his family, gave up his possessions to live strict poverty in imitation of Christ, relying only on charity for his sustenance. The primary activity of the Waldensians was preaching, which automatically placed them in opposition to the Church's teaching that only those who were in apostolic succession, the clergy, had the right to preach. If preaching illicitly didn't qualify as heresy, that they were preaching against bad priests and proclaiming such priests' sacraments as illegitimate solidified their heresy.<sup>327</sup> As their organization developed, the Waldensians divided into two groups. One group was called the "perfect" that became deacons and took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The second group consisted of lay women and men who shared the beliefs but adapted them to their home circumstances.<sup>328</sup>

The Cathars' (Albigensians) approach to reform was very different and perhaps leaned even more into heresy. Like the Waldensians, they lived a very austere life. They held the dualistic belief that all material aspects of the world were evil, created by evil, while all that was spiritual came from God and was good. Thus any "fleshly" realities, including the sacraments, were rejected as evil since they were earthly materials.<sup>329</sup> Their dualistic beliefs also include a belief that the Incarnation of Christ was an illusion and that Jesus was pure spirit. Because Christ was an illusion, Cathars believed that they should separate themselves as much as possible from the material world and practice

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., 210-211.

<sup>328</sup> Maurice Carmody, *The Franciscan Story: St. Francis of Assisi and His Influence Since the Thirteenth Century* (Twickenham: Athena Press, 2008), 97.

<sup>329</sup> Donald F. Logan, *The History of the Church*, 203.



extreme asceticism, yet they organized themselves in a structure that imitated the hierarchy of the Church. Large numbers joined them in reaction to the worldliness of the Roman clergy.<sup>330</sup>

These heretical movements did not come about in isolation. While the Church was managing the economy and government of the Papal States, the people looked for ways to live their faith. As the Church ignored the poverty and suffering created by a merchant economy and increasing its own wealth, the faithful looked for ways to follow the gospel. Thus, they rejected materialism and tried to live a simpler life. Those who participated in these movements chose poverty over material riches. This voluntary poverty and asceticism was similar to the way that Francis would choose to live.<sup>331</sup> In contrast to the Waldensians, Francis held the priesthood in high regard and simply lived the gospel but did so with his followers in a way that modeled community prayer and suffering together as they followed Jesus. They did this while remaining in the world rather than within the walls of a monastery.<sup>332</sup> The difference between Francis and these heretical movements was that Francis made his choices within the structures of the Church, seeking papal approval for anything that might appear to be heretical.

### **Middle Ages as a Microcosm of Post Modernity**

This period of growth in the medieval world saw major transitions of economy, politics and religion. According to Southern,

It was this new drive that did more than anything else to break down the old social and religious harmonies of the primitive age. Increasingly complex problems

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<sup>330</sup> Maurice Carmody, *The Franciscan Story*, 96.

<sup>331</sup> Donald F. Logan, *The History of the Church*, 213.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

demanded more refined solutions than the old practices and customs could provide. As populations grew, the problems of rights and obligations became more numerous and difficult; the methods of war, trade, and finance all became more refined, and the scope of these activities became greater. In every sphere of life the demand for expert knowledge became more urgent. Administration and specialization took the place of ritual as the chief instrument of government.<sup>333</sup>

In the transition from a feudal agrarian economy to a capitalistic merchant economy, old structures no longer served the new reality. The world became more complex and violent.

How are the Middle Ages and post modernity similar? Certainly, similarities exist, though on a smaller scale. Perhaps medieval society experienced its changes rapidly for the time. Perhaps the people felt the upheaval of such shifts in their lives. More specifically akin to post modernity, the Middle Ages saw the rise of a powerful economic system, established in the merchant class, guilds, and trade. For the time, this included some development of technology in the creation of needed tools and systems that would sustain economic profit. As noted above, poverty caused suffering as the gap between the haves and have-nots widened in this economic context. Violence increased as referenced above by Southern and Fortini. Migration, perhaps not as dramatic as post modern times, took place as the populations shifted to towns and cities. One can surmise that this created different kinds of environmental issues with water and waste as population centers became dense. The blend of Church and State in this time added stability to life, though as indicated above, the Church did not always meet the material and spiritual needs of the people it served. Commodification in the trade economy was

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<sup>333</sup> R.W. Southern, *Western Society and Church*, 35.

likely present in the competitiveness of the merchant system. All in all, the Middle Ages at the time of Francis might be considered an experience of globalization though on a smaller scale than post modernity because the medieval economy expanded connections with wider areas of Europe and Africa. According to Fortini, Assisi's location was ideal for trade,

Assisi was especially well situated for the commercial traffic, being on a road that would today be called a main artery of communication. It linked Rome and France and was therefore called Strada (or Via) Francesca (or Francigena). There is a reference to it in an eleventh-century document of the cathedral. This road went along the foot of the hill and so was also called 'the road at the base of the mountain.' ...it joined another road coming down from Assisi, one that, passing by the monastery of San Nicolo dell'Orto, went directly to Porziuncula.<sup>334</sup>

Business travel for the purpose of profit became more common as the merchant economy grew.

### **Francis's Medieval Context: Assisi**

This was the milieu out of which Francis experienced conversion. His moments of conversion responded to the realities of his society and culture. Assisi during Francis's time was a snapshot of the previous description of the Middle Ages. He was born into a merchant class family in which he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps as a cloth merchant. His father was known to have travelled regularly to France to trade. In fact, Francis was born while his father was in France and his mother named him Giovanni (John). When his father returned, he changed his son's name to Francesco (Francis)

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<sup>334</sup> Arnaldo Fortini, *Francis of Assisi*, 49.

because of his successful business in France. This main road gave merchants access to two major trade fairs at Champagne, France. Pietro Bernadone travelled the road to France regularly, buying the finest of fabrics for his business.<sup>335</sup>

As the economy of the merchant class was being established, the long, historical conflicts between the nearby town of Perugia and Assisi continued into the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Fortini describes the reason for the war as the usual reason for wars, vying for “economic self-sufficiency, living space.”<sup>336</sup> During Francis’s time, Assisi’s war with Perugia was fought by the merchant class and their guilds with the nobles on the periphery fighting for their own interests as it related to Assisi.<sup>337</sup> Fortini explains the role of Francis in the battle as well as the eco-political motivations for the war,

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the young merchant’s place in battle was under the banner of the commune. The merchants, as has been seen, were the very soul of the new communal movement. The Italian commune did not have its origin in a vision of the rights of man or in an ideal of liberty and equality or in a love for the humble and oppressed. On the contrary, it was rooted in a mania for material gain, a desire for commercial expansion.

The wars between the free cities demonstrate that fact. They did not fight each other for the affirmation of a social ideal. When the people of one commune found another city, society of merchants, or commune in their way, when they realized that they were strong enough to take over the forest, bridge or pass near their borders, they attacked, as they had the day before attacked the castle of

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 87-89.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 159

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

the feudal lord. As we have seen, the people of the communes did not hesitate to ally themselves with feudal lords themselves and with the German emperor when from this alliance they could gain an advantage over an enemy commune.<sup>338</sup>

Profit and greed fueled the conflict between Assisi and Perugia. Ultimately, Assisi lost the war which culminated in the Battle of Collestrada in 1202, and peace was achieved with Assisi accepting a truce.<sup>339</sup> But, while the lucrative merchant economy of Assisi grew, so did the reality of poverty. During Francis's life, extreme poverty was seen particularly in the six leper colonies that were scattered in the foothills of Mount Subasio below Assisi.<sup>340</sup> War, greed, and poverty were the context for profound conversion in Francis's life.

### **Francis' Conversion in Context**

Francis was a product of his family and his times, and the movement of his life reflects a gradual yet powerful turning toward God whom he came to know as "All Good." In first describing his conversion, we begin with the question: What was he converting from? Celano describes Francis as hedonistic and carefree. He was unmistakably in and of the materialistic world around him. "From the earliest years of his life his parents reared him to arrogance in accordance with the vanity of the age. And by long imitating their worthless life and character he himself was made more vain and arrogant."<sup>341</sup> Celano describes the manner in which children of this period were brought up Christian but were also parented with excess, indulgence and carelessness that

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<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>339</sup> Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs, *Pilgrim's Companion To Franciscan Places*, (Assisi: Editrice Minerva Assisi, 2002), 216.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>341</sup> Thomas of Celano, "The Life of St. Francis" in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint: Early Documents* (New York, New York City Press, 2001), 182.

included “shameful and detestable things.” Adolescents are unsupervised and engaged in “outrageous conduct.”<sup>342</sup> Celano goes on to say,

This is the wretched early training in which that man whom we today venerate as a saint...passed his time from childhood and miserably wasted and squandered his time almost up to the twenty-fifth year of his life.

Maliciously advancing beyond all of his peers in vanities, he proved himself a more excessive inciter of evil and zealous imitator of foolishness. He was an object of admiration to all, and he endeavored to surpass others in his flamboyant display of vain accomplishments: wit, curiosity, practical jokes and foolish talk, songs and soft and flowing garments. Since he was very rich, he was not greedy but extravagant, not a hoarder of money but a squanderer of his property, a prudent dealer but a most unreliable steward.<sup>343</sup>

As hagiography, Celano perhaps exaggerates the sin of Francis’s youth. Bonaventure’s *Major Legend* offers fewer remarks about Francis’s youthful behavior. He simply begins by saying, “For at a young age, he lived among foolish children of mortals and was brought up in foolish ways.”<sup>344</sup> Though these two accounts differ in intensity, Francis was thought to be well liked by his friends, to party in the streets at all hours of the night, and to be a leader of revelry. This is the state of his life before his conversion.

Before moving to the details of Francis’s conversion, we need to examine the general perception of conversion during the middle Ages. Since the question of conversion to Christianity itself was resolved by the fact that Christianity was generally

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<sup>342</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> Bonaventure, “The Major Legend of Saint Francis” in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder: Early Documents* (New York: New York City Press, 2000), 530.

compulsory, conversion in the sense of a non-Christian converting to Christianity did not have a prominent place in the lives of the general population. However, during Francis's life, the medieval understanding of conversion took on added meaning. Conversion was understood as one's movement from secular life into a religious order. A chronicle from the city of Bologna describes the presence of an itinerant preacher who visited the city for six weeks. This preacher, Brother Albert of Mantua, was known to travel from place to place outside of established religious practice to bring peace and conversion through penance/reconciliation. He was said to have made peace in several instances of murder as he preached from place to place.<sup>345</sup> Southern points out that the conversion in this case is not about joining a religious order, but rather, "the conversion is evidently some kind of interior conversion from a 'formal' to an 'effective' religious."<sup>346</sup> In this portrait of an itinerant preacher calling for conversion, we find early foundations for how Francis would live his life.

Rooted in key experiences, Francis's conversion revolved around a growing desire to follow Christ. For Francis, following Christ was not simply about following the rules of the Church; rather, he was intent on becoming like Christ, conforming his life to Christ's, following in the footsteps as literally as possible the One who called him. To 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes, his radical actions to live out his complete devotion to Christ seem extreme or even fanatical, especially in the ways that Francis entered into extreme suffering. Even so, it seemed to him that his efforts to imitate Christ in any given moment were never enough to satisfy his own expectations, and so he tried to do so in every way possible. The progression of his ongoing conversion was marked by significant

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<sup>345</sup> R.W. Southern, *Western Society Church*, 273-274.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

experiences and choices: as a prisoner of war, in an encounter with a leper, in prayer before the San Damiano crucifix, divesting himself of his family wealth, embracing Sacred Scripture, seeking union with Christ in the solitude of caves and receiving the stigmata at Mount La Verna. All of these led Francis to imitate Christ ever more authentically.

The following section looks at a chronology of significant events which tell the story of his ongoing conversion drawing from Francis's first biographer, Thomas of Celano and from the *Major Legend* written by Bonaventure.<sup>347</sup>

### **The Beginning of Francis's Conversion: Violence to Pacifism**

Francis lived at a time in which going to war or becoming a knight was a source of honor for self and family. He went to battle as a soldier for Assisi against Perugia in the Battle of Collestrada in 1202, was captured and imprisoned, and he became very ill. In 1203, his father paid ransom for his release. Celano describes Francis, "Thus, worn down by his long illness, as human obstinacy deserves since it is rarely remedied except through punishment, he began to mull over within himself things that were not usual for him."<sup>348</sup> The footnote to this sentence is pertinent, "Medieval hagiography frequently describes illness as providing the occasion for conversion."<sup>349</sup> Deeply affected by his experience, Francis came home to convalesce. He was not as social but rather withdrew from social activities.

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<sup>347</sup> See Appendix A to read texts pertinent to St. Francis's conversion from Celano and Bonaventure.

<sup>348</sup> Thomas of Celano, "The Life of St. Francis," 185.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 185, a.



This was an early turning point in his conversion, but he still wanted to do something large and great. Eventually, still looking for glory and honor, he decided to become a knight and join the Crusades. According to Celano,

Ignoring God's plan, he vowed out of vainglory and vanity to do great deeds. A certain nobleman from the city of Assisi was furnishing himself on a large scale with military weaponry and, swollen by the wind of empty glory, he asserted solemnly that he was going to Apulia to enrich himself in money or distinction, When Francis heard of this, because he was whimsical and overly daring he agreed to go with him. Although Francis did not equal him in nobility of birth, he did outrank him in graciousness; and though poorer in wealth, he was richer in generosity.<sup>350</sup>

In 1204, he prepared to leave, acquiring a horse, armor, and weapons which only a person of means could obtain. He did not get far, responding instead to a powerful dream or vision that revealed a store of weapons and armor in his home. So, thinking this was indicating that he would find glory at home, he returned to Assisi. However, he was very unsettled. While Francis attempted to do what family and society expected of him, his dream created distress interiorly. His outward direction toward greatness did not resonate within. Though the exact nature of his searching can't be known, most sources indicate that during this time he began to focus on God's desires for his life. In some manner, he continued his search for meaning. After these experiences of violence and turning toward God, Francis lived as a man of peace, a pacifist in contemporary terms.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 185.

## **Encounter with Beggars and Lepers: Affluence to Poverty**

In the midst of his searching, Francis encountered the poor of Assisi. When he worked at his father's shop, he once turned away a beggar and felt immediate remorse. He followed the beggar out and gave him more than the man had requested. His behavior became erratic in the eyes of the people of Assisi. He would go out alone in the beauty of nature and praise God. On one occasion, thieves came upon him, beat him and threw him in a ditch. When they had gone, Francis got up and continued to praise God. That the thieves had treated him as a poor, crazy person made him joyful as he continued to identify with those at the margins of his world.

Finally Francis encountered those of his society who were most marginalized on Mount Subasio. The sources tell us that he was afraid of and had a deep aversion to lepers. Perhaps the smell that resulted from the disease, the contagious nature of the disease, or the fact that lepers were expelled from society to live apart forever contributed to his repugnance. Even among the leper colonies, there was classism. Lepers who came from wealthier families lived in one area while those from poorer families lived in another. Francis encountered a leper along the road. He was drawn to embrace and kiss this person with a disease that repulsed him. In that experience, Francis's heart changed from revulsion to love for this person who suffered so greatly.<sup>351</sup> This encounter was one of Francis's most significant experiences of conversion. He would later minister among the lepers. There is conjecture that he contracted leprosy from his work among them. Choosing to associate with an outcast of society changed Francis's understanding of

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 195.

Christ's relationship with and love for the poor and suffering. He chose to identify with the poor and to live as a poor man.

### **The San Damiano Cross and Solitude in Caves: Conversion in Prayer**

A pivotal event of Francis's conversion occurred in prayer. In chapter two of Bonaventure's *The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, Bonaventure gives a lengthy account of these core experiences of Francis' conversion. The chapter is titled, "His Perfect Conversion to God and His Repair of Three Churches." Francis went just outside the walls of Assisi downhill to the church of San Damiano. He prayed before the crucifix, and heard the voice of Christ coming from it. Three times, he heard, "Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is all being destroyed."<sup>352</sup> He took the words literally, took cloth to sell from his father's business to get money so that he could repair the church and even sold the horse on which he was riding and returned to the little church. He was significantly moved by this command. He did not immediately understand what the voice had asked of him. However, he went to work repairing some of the small and crumbling churches around the hills of Assisi on Mount Subasio. Francis understood later that the Church that was falling into ruin, rather than actual buildings, was an institution that had grown corrupt and unfaithful to the gospel.

Prayer continued to nurture conversion in Francis. Throughout the rest of his life, he often went to the caves in the Rieti Valley, the Carceri above Assisi, and Mount La Verna to pray. He never went alone but was accompanied by at least two brothers who would see to his need for food even though he fasted from food for the most part. In these

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<sup>352</sup> Regis J. Armstrong, ed. *Such is the Power of Love: Saint Francis As Seen by Bonaventure*, 54.

cold and solitary places, Francis's relationship with God and his desire to imitate Christ deepened.

### **Opening the Scriptures: Conversion Through Scripture**

Though it is believed that Francis went to the grammar school at St. George, he was not a well learned person. It is uncertain if he could read the scriptures himself so he likely relied on his brothers who could read. Celano reports that he was rebuilding the Portiuncula and a priest was reading the gospel. Francis asked the priest to explain the reading. He told Francis that "Christ's disciples should not possess gold or silver or money, or carry on their journey a wallet or a sack, nor bread nor staff, nor to have two tunics, but that they should preach the kingdom of God and penance." These three scripture references from the synoptic gospels, Mt. 10:9-10, Lk 9:2, and Mk 6:12 pointed Francis toward a life that embraced poverty. His literal interpretation led him to own nothing, deepening his commitment to imitate Jesus as a poor man. He lived with very little and to relied on the goodness of God and the generosity of others for his needs.

### **Francis before the Bishop: Renouncing Worldly Values for the Gospel**

Two stories of Francis' relationship with his father shaped his conversion with regard to gospel values in contrast to the values of worldly values of his time. The first occurred when he took cloth from his father's shop, sold it and tried to give the money to one of the little churches outside the walls of the city. The priest at the church, knowing Francis's father was a powerful man and guessing where the money came from, refused to accept it. He was afraid of repercussions from Francis's father. Francis then threw the money onto a church windowsill and arranged with the priest to stay at the church to work. The money was left on the church windowsill. When his father discovered where

Francis was, he went to retrieve him, but Francis hid. Finally, Francis decided to face his father who was naturally very angry. Pietro took Francis home, locked him up in chains and went on a business trip to France. Pica, Francis's mother, broke the chains and released Francis.<sup>353</sup>

When his father returned, he tried to recover his son. This was futile so he went to recover the money Francis had given to the priest at San Damiano instead, which he found still on the windowsill of San Damiano church. His father's next step was to bring Francis before the bishop of Assisi in hopes that the Bishop would bring Francis to his senses. However, Francis renounced family and possessions, stripped naked and returned even his clothes to his father and said, "until now I have called you father here on earth, but now I can say without reservation, 'our Father who art in heaven,' since I have placed all my treasure and all my hope in him." As Francis stood naked, the bishop covered him with his mantle and ordered clothing for him, which were donated by a poor farmer who was an employee of the bishop.<sup>354</sup> In the weeks that followed, he returned to literally repair churches of San Damiano, Blessed Peter and the most Blessed Virgin Mother of God in response to the command of Christ only later realizing that his literal response was not exactly what Jesus had asked of him.<sup>355</sup> Thus, Francis rejected his family, the wealth of a substantial inheritance, and embraced more deeply a life of poverty. In doing so, he also rejected the values of his times and instead chose the gospel as his way of life. This was a moment of conversion in which he made a one hundred eighty degree turn regarding his values to embrace gospel values.

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 58

## **The Stigmata at LaVerna: Conversion to Full Identification with Christ**

Many years later Francis was given a mountain, La Verna, by a wealthy man. The mountain had enormous caves that would provide a place of solitude for prayer on the mountain. On this mountain, Francis reaches the peak of his conversion journey as he receives the stigmata. His desire to actually walk in Christ's footsteps, including the poverty of Christ's suffering, comes to fruition as the wounds of Christ become a part of his own flesh. Francis's open wounds parallel the wounds of Christ at crucifixion. Francis thus unifies himself to Christ in the closest way possible in his earthly life. This culminating event is the impetus for Bonaventure to write *Soul's Journey into God* and expand Francis's conversion experiences into a spiritual theology.

### **Francis: Embodiment of Ongoing Conversion**

The first chapter of this text explained the Third Order understanding of ongoing conversion: The first element is to acknowledge God and Christ in all of the created world-humans, plants, animals, rocks, and the entire cosmos. The second is to adore the Lord by living the gospel prayerfully, with one's whole life. The third is to serve the Lord by such actions as walking with the poor, acting on behalf of justice, caring for the earth, and advocating for peace.<sup>356</sup> These three focal points of conversion from the Rule are a thread that runs through the events that mark Francis's journey of ongoing conversion. His gradual awareness of God present in the splendor of the mountains and caves where he travelled, the unlikely beauty of the leper, and the presence of Christ in the gospel itself drew him to acknowledge the Lord. His desire for long periods of prayer in remote solitude and his choice to live poverty reflected his adoration of the Lord. His journey of

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<sup>356</sup> *Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis*, 15-16.

conversion led Francis to service of the Lord, which included ministry to poor, especially lepers.

### ***The Soul's Journey into God: Journey of Conversion***

#### **Background**

These pivotal moments of Francis's conversion held the essence of the Francis that Bonaventure wanted to absorb so that he could be effective in his role as Minister General of the Order. Thus, Bonaventure visited Mount La Verna in 1259, two years after he became the Minister General. He went there with the desire to capture the spirit of Francis, to ground himself in Francis so that he could authentically mediate the differences among these now 30,000 divided Friars in Germany, England, Spain, and Italy. The prologue of *Soul's Journey into God* states that Bonaventure was seeking peace, likely because these divisions weighed heavily on him. His retreat to La Verna became a time of deepening his awareness of Francis's conversion. Out of this reflection, Bonaventure expanded Francis's simple spirituality into a complex spiritual theology in the writing of *Soul's Journey into God*. This work integrates the spirituality of Francis, the spirituality of the time and Bonaventure's personal experience at La Verna.<sup>357</sup>

Bonaventure comes to La Verna from the context of his academic life at the University of Paris, where his contemporaries, including Aquinas, shaped his thought and writing. Three figures in Bonaventure's studies stand out as influential from his theological studies: Richard of St. Victor, St. Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius. An in depth study of each of them is beyond the scope of this dissertation, and so we will look at each of them briefly.

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<sup>357</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 17.

First, the Victorine influence came to Bonaventure through his Franciscan teacher, Alexander of Hales. This tradition held that theology must use symbol to represent the sacred. The only real way to express invisible theological realities was to use visible things to point to the sacred. In contrast to fact or science, a religious symbol holds mystery that engages the spiritual imagination. Bonaventure's appreciation for rich symbol is seen in chapter one of the *Soul's Journey into God* as the reader is led to an awareness of all of creation as a reflection of God.<sup>358</sup> The Victorine influence is also evident in Bonaventure's insight into the Trinity. Victorine theology held that the understanding of God as charity meant that God could not exist as a single entity. Charity, by definition, requires relationship. If God is the fullness of charity, then God must consist of plurality. The Trinity is the expression of relationship in which the love and goodness which is God communicates love and goodness beyond itself to the world. This notion of Trinity is the basis for Bonaventure's concept of Trinity.<sup>359</sup>

Second, Augustine believed that reason made sense after faith rather than reason proving faith. Bonaventure embraced this, believing that the mind and the heart working together led to wisdom. From Paul Rout, "Like Augustine, Bonaventure believed that theological reflection must begin with faith. Not faith in the sense of belief in certain propositions, but faith meaning the individual's fundamental conviction that life finds its ultimate meaning and significance in the God who has created this world and who holds and sustains creation in being."<sup>360</sup> From Augustine, Bonaventure receives the underpinning for the inward journey found in the third chapter of *Soul's Journey into*

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<sup>358</sup> Paul Rout, *Great Christian Thinkers: Francis and Bonaventure* (Liguori: Triumph, 1996), 32-33.

<sup>359</sup> Ilia Delio, *Simply Bonaventure*, 42-43.

<sup>360</sup> Paul Rout, *Great Christian Thinkers*, 24-25.



*God*. Augustine begins with the understanding that humans are in the image of God and then that God's light shines through the human person as in a mirror.<sup>361</sup> Augustine's focus on the human person in relationship to God provided Bonaventure with an early or pre-psychological view of the human person as capable of the journey to God.<sup>362</sup>

The third influence on Bonaventure's thought was the writings in the Pseudo-Dionysius. This Neo-Platonic philosophy gave Bonaventure the understanding that all of life came from one Source (emanation) and this Source (God) is in active relationship with all of Creation as goodness.<sup>363</sup> This Source has ordered creation in three hierarchical levels: entirely spiritual beings (angels), spiritual and material beings (humans), and material beings (animals, plants, rocks, etc.) that are related to each other. Each level relates to the other in that they serve to draw everything and everyone closer to God.<sup>364</sup> Bonaventure, then, develops an understanding of God that is evident in Pseudo-Dionysius, as well as Francis. No one word or image is capable of capturing the fullness of the divine. If God would be fully known, then God would no longer be God because God is Mystery. In Chapter 5 of *Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure particularly reflects this understanding of God as the Source, as goodness, and as the One to whom all returns.<sup>365</sup>

### **Bonaventure: Key Theological Elements**

Before entering into *Soul's Journey into God*, we will look briefly at significant aspects of Bonaventure's theology. Ewert Cousins describes Bonaventure's theological

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<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>363</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

system as clearly Trinitarian. God [the Father] is the “fountain-source of the divine fecundity.”<sup>366</sup> In this fecundity, God, the all Good, so overflows with fruitfulness, dynamism and self-expression that God’s self cannot be contained and so must be shared first with God’s self. Therefore, God is both one and three because God shares this fullness with the Son and they, in turn, with the Spirit. The fullness/fecundity that is Goodness overflows even further and so is manifest and shared in all of Creation: God is “self-diffusive.”<sup>367</sup> Hayes describes the self-diffusive Trinitarian God as well,

“...all of creation is on a journey. All pours out from the Father through the mediation of the Word and is brought to full fruition in the power of the Spirit. As it is the Word through whom all pours forth from God, so it is the Word who leads us to union with the Father in whom all creation will eventually converge. The work of the Spirit is to bring us ever more into the mystery of the Word who has been manifested to us most explicitly in the form of the incarnation. In the incarnation, the center of God becomes present as the center of creation.”<sup>368</sup>

Thus the entirety of creation reflects the endless abundance all Good that is the Trinitarian God.

Another characteristic of Bonaventure’s theology is his use of the doctrine of exemplarism in which he understands creatures to exemplify God. Bonaventure understands the Trinitarian God to be Creator in that all of creation emanates from the Creator. Therefore, as Creator all that is created is a reflection of the one who created.<sup>369</sup> Exemplarism is the vehicle for contemplation in *Soul’s Journey into God*. It is the idea

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<sup>366</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God*, 24.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>368</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 49.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

that all that God created is an expression of God and points to God. Cousins describes the use of exemplarism as contemplation in which “we can look upon any object in creation and trace it back to its archetype in the divine mind; and since it flowed from the divine mind out of the fecundity of the inner Trinitarian life, we can see it reflecting the power, wisdom and goodness of God as moments of the inner dynamism of God.”<sup>370</sup> Drawing primarily from the Greek tradition, the doctrine of exemplarism is the building block for *Soul’s Journey into God* and is Bonaventure’s key to expressing Francis’s encompassing relationship to all of creation expressed in the *Canticle of the Creatures*.<sup>371</sup> Cousins says of *Soul’s Journey into God*, “Instead of singing a direct hymn of praise like Francis, Bonaventure contemplates the vast sweep of creation and sees in it a reflection of the power, wisdom and goodness of God as a vestige of the Trinity. In contrast to Francis’s simple directness, Bonaventure’s approach presupposes the speculative tradition of Christian theology derived from the Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine and Anselm...it contains a point of convergence with Francis’s Canticle in the simple experience of religious awe awakened in us by the wonders of creation.”<sup>372</sup> Francis simply praised God in all of creation while Bonaventure, using the doctrine of exemplarism, gives theological depth to Francis’s praises. Hayes describes their relationship this way: “St. Francis can be seen as a person of immediate religious experience. On the other hand, Bonaventure appears as the theologian, who, more completely than any other, transformed this

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<sup>370</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Souls Journey into God*, 26.

<sup>371</sup> Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites: The Theology of Bonaventure* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978), 44-46.

<sup>372</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God*, 29.

religious experience into a rich, theological vision of creatures as mirrors reflecting God's power, wisdom and goodness."<sup>373</sup>

## **Prologue**

The Prologue of *Soul's Journey into God* sets the stage for the journey and highlights the themes of peace, desire and "the poor one in the desert."<sup>374</sup> Bonaventure begins by praying for peace, calling upon the Trinitarian God to provide enlightenment and peace for the journey. As noted earlier, he is seeking peace himself, and here he extols Francis as the exemplar of a man of peace. As he reflects on Francis, he recalls the vision that Francis had on Mount La Verna of the six winged seraph (angel) and saw the six wings as symbolic of the stages of the journey to God, six levels of illumination. The one who seeks this peace must truly desire union with God so that she/he is able to freely receive grace. Bonaventure emphasizes strongly that deep, fervent prayer in Christ is the way of expressing such desire.<sup>375</sup> He warns the reader to be aware of what prevents one from making this journey (sinfulness) and to beware of relying solely on reason to the exclusion of faith as the path for this journey:

First, therefore, I invite the reader to the groans of prayer through Christ crucified, through whose blood we are cleansed from the filth of vice-so that he not believe that reading is sufficient without unction, speculation without devotion, investigation without wonder, observation without joy, work without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, endeavor without divine grace, reflection as a mirror without divinely inspired wisdom. To those,

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<sup>373</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 61.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

therefore, predisposed by divine grace, the humble and the pious, the contrite and the devout, those anointed with the oil of gladness, the lovers of divine wisdom, and those inflamed with a desire for it, to those wishing to give themselves to glorifying, wondering at and even savoring God, I propose the following considerations...<sup>376</sup>

Bonaventure closes the Prologue by inviting the reader to move slowly through the journey, looking past any shortcomings of the writer and instead to look toward the faith and truth to which the words point.<sup>377</sup> Each of the seven chapters in *Soul's Journey into God* is a stage of contemplation in the journey. Chapters one through six describe six distinct contemplative moments while the seventh describes full union with God.

### **Stages of the Journey into God**

#### **Contemplation of God in the Vestiges of the Universe**

Bonaventure accomplishes two purposes in Chapter 1. He first describes the phases and stages of the journey with reference to the Seraph in Isaiah (and Francis's vision of the six winged seraph). The three pairs of wings signify three phases of the journey with each wing representing one the six stages. The three phases are the outer world, the interior world and the ascent to God. His second purpose is to describe the first stage of the journey. Here, the reader is invited to observe the outer world, all of creation, non-living and living beings. In looking at creation, one is to see it as a mirror through which one passes in movement toward God. What God has created reflects some aspect of God as a reflection in a mirror. Bonaventure uses the word "vestige" for this reflection, which Bill Short describes as a kind of footprint in the sand. The footprint communicates

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<sup>376</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God*, 55-56.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-57.

something about the person (size, direction of travel), but it is not the person. In the same way creation is a vestige, an imprint of God, but it is not God.<sup>378</sup> Bonaventure then proceeds with a hermeneutic on how human persons interpret: through the five senses, then by considering the origins of created beings, and finally using reason to determine whether something is inanimate, living or both living and able to think. Then one is able to consider how the beings of the outer world reflect the goodness that is God, “From these visible things, therefore, one rises to consider the power, wisdom, and goodness of God as existing, living, intelligent, purely spiritual, incorruptible and unchangeable.”<sup>379</sup> This stands in contrast to the Cathars who saw the material world as evil.<sup>380</sup> In fact, this recognition of creation as reflective of God is a basis for Francis’s choice for poverty as his way of life. Francis sees all of creation as gift from God, therefore, how can one personally possess what God has given to all?<sup>381</sup> Bonaventure concludes the first chapter by saying that anyone who is unable to praise God for the beauty of creation is blind, deaf and dumb, and he encourages the reader to open her/his senses to this moment of contemplation.<sup>382</sup>

### **Contemplation of God in the Vestiges in the World of the Senses**

In the second stage, Bonaventure expands the understanding of how human beings comprehend creation through the five senses. He describes the outer world of creation as the ‘macrocosm’ and the human person as the “microcosm.” The outer world enters the inner world first through the five senses and becomes knowledge. This is

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<sup>378</sup> William Short, *Saint Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God* (Now You Know Media, 2013), audio CD, 5 discs, disc 2.

<sup>379</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God*, 65.

<sup>380</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 58.

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>382</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God*, 67-68.

perception. This knowledge that comes through the senses then enters the soul, not as a physical object but as a likeness of the thing perceived. This is apprehension. Finally, the object is considered by its quality, whether it is delightful, pleasurable, beautiful, etc. and then to reason why the object is so described. This is judgment. “And thus the whole world can enter into the human soul through the doors of the senses by the three operations mentioned above.”<sup>383</sup> Bonaventure then points the reader toward contemplation of the created world as exemplification of God. Creation is divinely ordered (for example: number, size, proportion), and Bonaventure here draws from the orderliness of Pythagorean mathematics and Greek aesthetics.<sup>384</sup> Because of this, creation, which we can perceive, apprehend and judge through our senses, is the way in which we can know God who is invisible. Bonaventure describes this moment of contemplation: “From all this, one can gather that from the creation of the world the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen, being understood through the things that are made...”<sup>385</sup>

### **Contemplation of God through the Image Imprinted on our natural powers**

In the next two stages of the journey, Bonaventure moves to the inner world of the human person, articulating his anthropology. In doing so, he focuses on the image of the Divine within the human person. His starting point is that God is not only reflected in creation, of which human beings are part, but God is particularly reflected in the soul of the human person. Drawing from Augustine, he begins from the premise that if humans are made in the image and likeness of God, then examining human interiority, from what

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>384</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 68.

<sup>385</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God*, 77.

in that time might be a psychological perspective, would be helpful in describing how the human person is made in God's image.<sup>386</sup> Indeed, the Soul becomes an image of God as indicated by Hayes, "In Bonaventure's understanding, to speak of the soul as an image of God is to describe the human being as an openness, or as a potential to a yet deeper communication of the divine that we have just seen in the previous section on the faculties of the soul."<sup>387</sup> To do so, Bonaventure focuses on three functions of the soul: memory, intellect, and will. He uses these functions to show how the soul is the Divine Image within.

First, memory has the function of retaining things past, present and future and so is an image of eternity. Memory holds the visible received by the senses and the invisible which is received from God. Finally, the memory "has an unchangeable light within itself in which it remembers immutable truths." Because of these three functions, the soul of the human person is an image of God and can participate in the life of God.<sup>388</sup> With regard to intellect, the human person has the capacity to know eternal truth, to know the Eternal God. Since nothing is absolutely constant or certain except God, and God is the one who is immutable, then God's light enlightens human intellect with truth. The intellect has the ability to know this and is therefore an image of God.<sup>389</sup> The function of will or choice has to do with "deliberation, judgment and desire." Deliberation is the capacity to know what is better or best, and one cannot deliberate this choice without knowing some measure of what best looks like. The knowledge of best comes from God. Judgment is the ability to determine certitude or truth, and this too can only be of God.

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<sup>386</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 83.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>388</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God*, 81.

<sup>389</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-83.



Desire is manifest in wanting the highest love or highest good, which again is from God. “See, therefore, how close the soul is to God, and how, in their operations, the memory leads to eternity, the understanding to truth, and the power of choice to the highest good.”<sup>390</sup>

### **Contemplation of God in the Image Reformed by the Gifts of Grace**

In the previous stage, one is led to awareness of the Divine Image within. In the next step of the journey, contemplation turns to awareness of the need for the redemptive work of Christ poured out in grace. Hayes explains, “Bonaventure clearly distinguishes the soul as formed by God in creation and as deformed by sin through human failure, and therefore in need of being reformed by the grace of God in Christ.”<sup>391</sup> Thus, even though the soul is formed in the image of God, by God, humans are de-formed by sinfulness. Bonaventure likens this to someone who has fallen and needs help standing again. The de-formed human person must be re-formed with help. This help is found in the grace of God through Christ. Bonaventure says that the soul needs to be purified, illumined and perfected. For this to happen, the soul must have faith in Christ which creates a spiritual openness: “The image of our soul, therefore, should be clothed with the three theological virtues, by which the soul is purified, illumined and perfected. And so the image is reformed and made like the heavenly Jerusalem and a part of the Church... The soul, therefore, believes and hopes in Jesus Christ and loves him, who is incarnate, uncreated and inspired word... When by faith the soul believes in Christ... it recovers its spiritual hearing and sight...”<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>391</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 91.

<sup>392</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God*, 89

Bonaventure describes three actions through which the soul is reformed by grace: purgation, illumination and consummation. Purgation is grace taking away anything that stands in the way of the soul's journey to God. Illumination is the soul seeing the world as Christ sees the world. Consummation is when the soul is more and more deeply joined with God in love.<sup>393</sup> Thus, for the soul to be the image of God, sin must be reformed by grace so that the human person is able to fully participate as a co-creator with God in the world.<sup>394</sup> Though we may not use these medieval terms, these three actions describe the process of conversion and the work of formation.

### **Contemplation of the Divine Unity through God's Primary Name, Which is Being.**

In the first two stages of the soul's journey, Bonaventure points the reader to the expression of God in the outer world of creation. In the middle two stages of the journey, he considers the way in which God is manifest interiorly in the human person. In the final two stages, he turns to the manifestation of God above. The fifth stage of the journey to God moves into a metaphysical understanding of God as Being. Hayes points to the scripture from Exodus in which Moses asks what name to tell the Israelites is God's name. God responds in what is translated into English as "I am who I am." In the Greek translation the literal translation would be, "the being-one."<sup>395</sup> Bonaventure proceeds with a metaphysical discussion of God and the mystery of Being and non-being, which addresses the perpetual question of why anything exists at all. Hayes explains, "The mystery of being: Why is there something rather than nothing? If everything in our experience seems to be contingent, does this mean that there must be something that

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<sup>393</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 94.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 98

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

exists necessarily? And if that is the case, does that mean that something of the necessary being might be intimated in our experience of contingency?”<sup>396</sup> In the attempt to answer these questions, one eventually returns to the concept that being exists before all and that being is the divine Being.

Bonaventure then uses the metaphor of light to describe how the human person experiences Being. Using Aristotle’s image of a bat unable to see in the light of day, Bonaventure tells the reader that human intellect is blind to the intense light of being, “Thus our mind accustomed to the darkness of beings and the images of the things of sense, when it glimpses the light of the supreme Being, seems to see nothing. It does not realize that this very darkness is the supreme illumination of our mind, just as when the eye sees pure light, it seems to itself to see nothing.”<sup>397</sup> As Hayes explains, Being is a part of everything that exists and therefore God is involved with everything even though God is not visible.<sup>398</sup> He goes on to say, “The truth of God’s existence, then, is a truth that arises from the existence of every creature and is naturally imprinted on the human mind. The universe is filled with God; every creature proclaims the existence of God.”<sup>399</sup> The description of God as Being concludes with Bonaventure pointing to the Mystery that is God expressed in superlatives. The journey of the soul has thus contemplated on the divine Being, the Mystery that is beyond definition or description.

### **Contemplation of the Trinity in Its Name, which is Good**

Bonaventure now moves from contemplation of the divine present in the notion of Being to the divine present in the All Good Trinity. He first defines the highest good as

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>397</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God*, 96-97.

<sup>398</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 105.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 106.

that about which nothing can be described as better. Since nothing can be better than the highest good, then only God is the highest good and, as the highest good, is a self-diffusive unity of three in one that overflows into all creation. In this part of the journey, Bonaventure works out the Neo-platonic notion of self-diffusion in the Trinity described earlier in this chapter. If God is the highest Good, then to say God is not self-diffusive would be impossible since Good cannot be anything other than self-diffusive.<sup>400</sup> Hayes describes this aspect of Bonaventure's theology as a reinterpretation of the Neo-platonic notion of the good through the theological lens of Richard of St. Victor:

The argument revolves around an analysis of the nature of love. If God is the highest Good, and the nature of the highest Good is to be found in the highest form of love, then the mystery of the Trinity becomes the mystery of the primordial, self-communicative love which is productive within the Godhead before it moves outside to create the universe... Bonaventure crafts for us a vision of the divine as purest, loving, self-communicative Being.

Internally, God is the purest, loving self-communication. This is the point of the doctrine of the Trinity. In Bonaventure's view, if we wish to see God not simply as Being but as supreme Good, then we are well on the way to saying that there must be some plurality of persons in God.<sup>401</sup>

This contemplation on God includes the recognition that if you can conceive that the Trinity self-communicates the highest good, then the Trinity must indeed exist as three persons which are "supreme communicability; from supreme communicability, supreme

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<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>401</sup> Zachary Hayes, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, 109-110.

consubstantiality, supreme configurability; and from these coequality and hence supreme coeternity...<sup>402</sup>

Bonaventure continues to expand his understanding of God as self-diffusive good in the Trinity using the notion of coincidence of opposites, in which an entity may be one while containing opposite qualities simultaneously. He explains, “Opposites genuinely coincide while at the same time continuing to exist as opposites. They join in a real union, but one that does not obliterate differences; rather it is precisely the union that intensifies the difference.”<sup>403</sup> Bonaventure tells the reader that contemplating the self-diffusive Trinity as Good is not simple:

But when you contemplate these things, do not think that you comprehend the incomprehensible. For you still have something else to consider which strongly leads our mind’s eye to amazement and admiration. For here is supreme communicability with individuality of persons, supreme consubstantiality with plurality of hypostases, supreme configurability with distinct personality, supreme coequality with degree, supreme coeternity with emanation, supreme mutual intimacy with mission. Who would not be lifted up in admiration at the sight of such marvels? But we understand with complete certitude that all of these things are in the most blessed Trinity. If we lift up our eyes to the superexcellent goodness. For if there is here supreme communication with true diffusion, there is also here true origin and true distinction...<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God*, 104.

<sup>403</sup> Ewert Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites*, 20.

<sup>404</sup> Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul’s Journey into God*, 105.

Bonaventure is inviting a kind of contemplation that recognizes God in all of his words and beyond, knowing that no words or images completely or adequately capture the fullness, totality, or magnitude of God's overflowing, abundant, infinite goodness and love.

### **The Journey as Ongoing Conversion**

Bonaventure takes the reader on a contemplative journey that invites the whole person to move toward God until the final moment when one passes through death to the fullness of God. In the first phase of the journey, the reader is invited first to recognize God in Creation and to take in the created world through the senses. This invites the person into a relationship with God through the created world that then leads to intellectual conversion. In taking in information about the outer world, contemplation invites the reader to acknowledge God (from Third Order Rule), particularly present in the qualities of God reflected in the outer world. Surrounded by all that God has created, one cannot deny the generosity and creative energy of God.

In the second phase of the journey, the reader contemplates the presence of God within. This interior reflection first recognizes that God is already part of our soul, but that the human person is imperfect. Here the person recognizes her/his broken state (i.e. sin, fallibility, imperfections, and shortcomings) and the need for healing and change which is possible because of God's reforming grace. This phase leads to moral and religious conversion in which one grasps the reality that she/he is indeed created in the image of God and then to express that awareness in actions or behaviors. In novitiate formation, this happens in rubbing elbows in communal living, family of origins work,

spiritual direction, counseling, and ultimately in a deeper recognition and acceptance that one is loved totally and unconditionally by God.

The final phase of conversion in the journey is in the contemplation of God. This chapter leads the reader to expand her/his image or understanding of God and to be astounded by the unquantifiable presence of the All Good, as well as to embrace the concept that God, as Trinity, is a relationship of love that overflows into all creation. This is the moment of Franciscan conversion that the Third Order Rule describes as adoring God. In adoration of the self-diffusive God, one falls ever more in love with God, again leading to moral and religious conversion. This falling in love can lead to a relationship with God so intimate that God's values become one's personal values permeated in the words, actions and attitudes of the whole person; the Third Order Rule calls this serving God.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter gets to the heart of Franciscan conversion as it emerged from a simple man living his faith in response to his context. In other words, the chapter goes to core sources as the avenue for understanding Franciscan conversion. In the first section of this chapter, we surveyed Francis' milieu of the Middle Ages. It is clear that this was an era of significant change out of which the need for conversion emerged. Feudalism was decreasing as mercantilism became central to life. Church was intertwined with politics and economics, exhibiting great affluence. Francis experienced conversion as he lived simple faith in medieval Assisi, and his conversion attracted others. As the feudal order receded and the merchant class gained power, the gap between the rich and poor widened. The Church, enmeshed in this system as well, created disillusionment among

the faithful engendering the desire for reforms that led to heresy. Even so, Francis remained connected with the Church so that he and his followers would not be dismissed as heretics. Violence in local conflicts, which he experienced firsthand as a young man, also contributed to the chaos of his time. Francis's own conversion grew out of a searching that led him to a profound desire to follow Christ and to embrace the heart of the gospel as his guide in this turbulent time. Francis, subsequently, became a model for conversion as he brought the core of the gospel to bear on the fragmentation of his own time. By his living this charism, the church and the world were confronted with the gospel.

In the next section of this chapter, the uncomplicated conversion journey of Francis is expanded by Bonaventure. In *The Soul's Journey into God*, he breaks open the understanding of Francis's conversion into a spiritual theology. He does so as he describes the relationship that can develop between God and the human person (soul). In *The Soul's Journey into God*, the moments of Francis' conversion are given particularity that Francis hardly would have recognized. Still, in this work, Francis' encounters with the Trinitarian God in specific experiences of conversion are grounded in the theology of Bonaventure's time. The influence of his contemporaries is reflected in Bonaventure's use of symbol to denote the sacred (six winged seraph) and Trinity as a relationship that goes beyond itself in abundant love. His attention to faith before reason is stated from the beginning in the Prologue. His use of the doctrine of exemplarism expresses what Francis lived, that all creation as a vestige of the Divine is about relationship with God. Through the stages of the journey, Bonaventure describes a growing relationship with God that



might be described as union or intimacy. The stages move from the external, to the internal and finally to a profound relationship with the All Good God.

The contemporary theology of conversion discussed in the previous chapter informs the description of Franciscan conversion in the present chapter. From this medieval theology of conversion as a journey of the soul, contemporary expressions of conversion are evident within the categories described by Lonergan and Gelpi. As well, the developmental notion of conversion from Fowler is in a more rudimentary form in the stages of Bonaventure's journey. If one makes this journey that Bonaventure lays out for the reader, the reader's life will be transformed outwardly, interiorly and in her/his ever growing relationship with God. Though Bonaventure does not have the language of self-transcendence, he does speak the redemptive grace that addresses human sinfulness. Sinfulness is a self-centered state of being, and so for sinfulness to be redeemed indicates that the ego steps aside in favor of a deeper relationship with God. The experience of Francis and the spiritual theology of Francis echo contemporary notions of conversion. They remain relevant as post modern people's search for God, meaning, and relationship. Bonaventure's depiction of conversion as a journey, as seen in Francis's life and in Bonaventure's work, indicates that conversion has the potential to be ongoing and ever deepening today and into the future.

## **Chapter Five: Animating the Charism of Conversion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this dissertation has been to examine the Third Order charism of conversion as both relevant and needed for post modernity and to develop means to pass the charism on to future generations. The work in the previous chapters now points toward the tasks of this final chapter. The first task is to review the research and the methodology. The second is to articulate the lens of normativity of the future in relationship to the research. The third is to present connections in the research from the chapters. Finally, this chapter will offer concrete suggestions for handing on the charism beyond formal religious life based on the initiatives of one Franciscan congregation.

The initial reason for this study emerged from the realization that Franciscan women religious who have articulated, lived and expressed the charism are decreasing in number in the midst of a transitional time in religious life. However, the value of the charism is not totally dependent on its place in religious life. Francis himself was not the sole carrier of the charism. In fact, Francis did not set out to form a charism, start a community or even a movement. He simply cooperated with God's grace in his conversion and others followed. He lived the gospel authentically and radically in such a way that others found their spiritual hungers satisfied in his way of life. A similar hunger exists today as people seek to fill the emptiness that comes from greed, poverty, and disconnection. Our post modern world needs Franciscan living that grows out of the charism of conversion just as the world of Francis needed the way of life that he offered in the Middle Ages.

## Structure, Methodology and Findings

In the endeavor to appropriate Franciscan conversion for contemporary life, this study has followed Holland and Henriot's pastoral circle in order to respond to the question of how to animate the Third Order charism of conversion for the future. Each of the four parts of the circle mediates human experience: insertion, social analysis, theological reflection and pastoral planning.<sup>405</sup> However, while each chapter of the current work focuses generally on one moment of the circle, the four aspects of the circle do not exist in isolation, but are "linked and overlap."<sup>406</sup> The preceding chapters examine the charism of conversion from several angles in order to move toward a practical theology of conversion for today.

In chapter one, the study began with an insertion into the introductory experiences of Francis, Bonaventure, women religious and the notion of charism as it applies to religious life and initial formation of new members of religious communities. This chapter also began to unpack a definition of conversion in service of understanding the dynamics of conversion as a charism. Significantly, contemporary development of the notion charism in the Vatican II renewal of religious life has given Franciscan women new energy and purpose to bring the charism to the post-modern world. However, the renewal has also been influenced by socio-cultural developments, and the ramifications have led to smaller populations of women religious as a whole. This has resulted in fewer sisters to live and share the charism, but this is happening in the context of a post Vatican II Church with an active laity who can embrace this charism as did the lay people who

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<sup>405</sup> Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis*, 7.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

originally followed Francis. This is the starting point for the research in the remaining chapters.

The next step in the pastoral circle is social analysis, and chapter two accomplished two major tasks of social analysis relevant to the Franciscan charism. The first task was to examine post modernity. The research revealed that this era has generated situations that call for a gospel response. The issues are many and won't be recounted here again. However, they call for attention to gospel values of solidarity in relationships, promotion of human dignity, the right to have basic needs met and care for the earth. In other words, the situation of globalization more than ever calls for love of neighbor and love of God put into action. This is evident in the analysis of widespread human and ecological suffering that calls for the gospel. The Franciscan perspective of David Couturier acknowledges that post modernity has favored individualism and privatization over relationality and community. Gerry Lobo notes that the gospel calls for a relationship between conversion and social ethics. In other words, one's growing relationship with God is evident in actions that bring healing, peace and justice to the world. Thus, the Franciscan charism of conversion offers a particular faith lens to the global context. Post modernity, with its progress and problems, is the socio-cultural environment that calls for gospel conversion. The characteristics of post modernity described in chapter two are the signs of the times referred to in Catholic Social Teaching that call for conversion. As global capitalism increases, those suffering from poverty, violence and discrimination also grow in number. These are the people on the margins of society who are oppressed, underserved, poor, and at risk. These are the ones for and about whom the gospel is written.

The second half of chapter two reviewed the socio-cultural shifts that have affected contemporary religious life in post modernity. As the world changed, so did the Church with religious life as a part of it. As has been seen, U.S. religious life navigated dramatic changes in the process of renewal. Prior to Vatican II, charism was not a concept commonly associated with religious life. However, as many religious congregations discovered and embraced their founding values, charisms were defined and then integrated to enrich congregational identities. Congregations discovered the abundant treasures at the heart of their gospel lives. The Council's directives for renewal changed religious life in other ways, as well. The ensuing drastic shifts in lifestyles, along with the women's movement made religious life a less popular choice for women as opportunities for ministry within the Church opened up. Along with cultural shifts, religious life was affected by generational differences. Women no longer entered a community right out of high school. New members came and still come with differing expectations and formational needs depending on age and experiences.

Thus, as women religious clarified their charisms and missions, they moved from former ministries within the Church to ministry among and with the marginalized. At the same time, congregational populations decreased. In this new framework, initial formation also went through an ambiguous period until clarity of the purpose of formation in this new context evolved. Largely due to the Vatican II renewal, religious life now has great vitality among its membership, but the long term viability of communities is in question. Women's congregations who entered fully into the renewal, including Third Order Franciscan women's communities, experienced great upheaval but also new vision. The renewed religious communities that emerged after they developed

new understanding of their charisms and missions have much to offer our post modern world and need not disappear as membership decreases.

If this Third Order charism is to be an authentic gift, then understanding the concept of conversion in theory and practice is helpful. This is the purpose of chapter three, which begins the first part of the theological reflection task on the pastoral circle. For this task, the work of Lonergan, Gelpi, Fowler and Couturier provide theological descriptions of the process of conversion. Both Lonergan and Gelpi describe the movements of conversion in the human person. Lonergan, in his categories of conversion, identifies conversion as a process that touches a person's intellect, affect, morality, and spirituality. For him, this process takes place over time as a person goes through significant events. In the experiences that lead to religious conversion, the ego or self recedes in importance as a relationship with God becomes more intimate. Because of a growing communion with God, the needs of others come into focus. This union with God is self-transcendence and leads to a new understanding of self and God that changes the direction of one's life. Gelpi's categories of conversion are similar to Lonergan, but he describes the process as a turning from irresponsibility to responsibility in some part or parts of one's life. This implies that a person's behavior and actions reflect the responsibility that she/he has embraced and are accountable for those actions. Perhaps most importantly, both Lonergan and Gelpi affirm that religious conversion does not happen without God's grace and without human cooperation with that grace.

Fowler's stages of adult faith development inform Lonergan and Gelpi's theologies of conversion. He adds a psycho spiritual understanding of conversion as happening over time and throughout one's life. He also describes conversion as

happening out of crisis moments in one's life. Disturbances, struggles or challenges prompt change, re-ordering priorities and re-appropriating one's relationship with the Divine. The stages of adult development (Individuative-reflective, conjunctive, and universalizing), provide a developmental lens for self-transcendence, a gradual letting go of ego. In young adulthood, one may begin to make significant choices that form adult identity about faith and faith commitments. In mid life, the need for perfection falls away and an ability to hold ambiguity without stress can emerge. An adult that reaches universalizing faith is able to put the self aside and act on faith without reservations. Conversion seems to take a person on a journey that has varying degrees of self-transcendence depending upon experiences and cooperation with God's grace.

In order to take the theology of conversion toward a Franciscan definition, chapter three turned to David Couturier, the biblical concept of penance and the Third Order Regular Rule. Couturier, echoing the theology of Bonaventure, names Incarnation and Trinity as primary dimensions of Franciscan conversion. For him, conversion is not simply following rules of Church or becoming rigid around religion. Rather, conversion is internal in that leads to great love and flexibility in responding to God and to others. The Franciscan understanding of conversion, emerging from the biblical concept of penance or repentance, resonates with Couturier. Internalizing a relationship with God through Christ, leads to turning away from all that is incongruent with that relationship. The practice of "turning away from" leads to conversion, which may then lead to more turning away and more conversion. In this sense, conversion is an ongoing process.

Penance, then, is profoundly simple in the Third Order Regular Rule and is the defining structure for Franciscan conversion. It names three basic actions that comprise

the charism. First, in knowing God, one takes on the values of Christ and continually grows in union with God. The action of adoring God is more than admiration or prayers of praise. It encompasses the whole person's life of relationships and is observable in gospel commitments such as prayer, lived poverty, and solidarity with the poor. The action of service is about being so in love with God through Christ that one is compelled to work for peace, justice, community and anything that benefits the poor. Thus, the charism of conversion is important for post modernity because it brings gospel values to bear on situations and people who are suffering from the negative aspects of this era. In places of brokenness, fragmentation, violence and poverty, those who follow Christ in the tradition of Francis discover the profound love of God in all of creation. They experience a union with God that calls them to service, community, solidarity, and peacemaking.

With these descriptions of conversion, chapter three turned to the conversion experience that can potentially unfold in the formation of new members, particularly in the novitiate. The canonical year sets the stage for intellectual, moral and spiritual conversion through knowledge gained in classes, communal life that challenge individualism, prayer that deepens one's relationship with God and self reflection that helps get the ego out of the way of being present and focused on others. In Franciscan novitiate formation, this goal is both immediate and long term: the intention is that novices experience conversion in the novitiate year and then embrace ongoing conversion as a way of life. The gradual conversion that takes place in the novitiate is a result of the ways novices recognize their own goodness as *imago dei*, acknowledge their imperfect humanity, spend time in prayer and reflection, practice community living skills, and live out the mission of the gospel in the context of their congregations. The twelve month



time frame of the novitiate year is an intense communal environment that leads to personal conversion. The intensity comes from both introspection and from the members of the novitiate house being together almost constantly. Dissonance and conflict force each novice to examine her own motivations and behaviors in light of norms for living a healthy religious life. Moving through such struggles faithfully can lead novices to a new understanding of themselves, God, community life and their role in the mission of the gospel. In a sense a novitiate year could rightly be called a conversion year as it sets the tone for a way of life based on the desire for ongoing conversion.

A pivotal part of the novitiate year is internalizing the story of Francis' own conversion. This leads to the second part of our theological reflection on the pastoral circle. Francis's own life is the foundation for the understanding of ongoing conversion in the Third Order Regular tradition. His conversion led to a way of life that attracted followers then and now. His adult life was disturbed and then brought to a new depth of gospel living time after time. From the San Damiano cross, to the encounter with the leper until he received the stigmata before his death, Francis lived in imitation of Christ in ever deepening moments. In his *Soul's Journey into God* Bonaventure expressed the fullness of Francis' conversion as a spiritual theology, a journey that expands and deepens one's relationship with God. Such profound connection with the divine cannot help but find expression in a lived faith that includes behaviors that are congruent with the Trinitarian Goodness with whom one lives an intimate relationship. In a sense, the birth of the charism is evident in the life of Francis and his consequential choices to live the gospel/follow in the footprints of Christ. In the *Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure profoundly develops the spiritual theology of Francis's conversion experiences,

conveying the human potential of each person to experience conversion in a growing intimacy with God. The charism of conversion, then, is firmly rooted in both contemporary theologies of conversion and in the historical theology of the Franciscan tradition.

### **Normativity of the Future**

From our primary methodology of the pastoral circle, we then looked at how the normativity of the future points the charism forward. Bierenger and Elsbernd identify four markers for using this approach. The first is to ask if the charism of conversion offers a vision for the future. In viewing the charism through this lens, we can visualize the hope that God has for our future. It begins with the premise that God does not want to see creation/humanity suffering but wants a just future for all.<sup>407</sup> In the characteristics of post modernity, we have seen the suffering, violence, and poverty of a global community in the recent past and present. Franciscan conversion as a vehicle for gospel values is about healing, peacemaking, and walking with the poor. The charism does offer a gospel vision for the future. Bonaventure takes that vision and outlines a path that is available to everyone in any era in *The Soul's Journey into God*. His description of total union with God epitomizes an eschatological vision for the future. Just as Francis brought a new vision of the gospel to his contemporary world, so Third Order Franciscans today have the opportunity to instill the charism of ongoing conversion. For the future, this means living the gospel in ways that open the possibilities of healing, justice, peace, hope, wholeness, goodness, and openness to God's breaking into the present through those who live a Franciscan life of ongoing conversion.

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<sup>407</sup> Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, *Normativity of the Future*, 7.

Franciscan eschatology is a vision of God's profound love. What surfaces from Francis's conversion moments, and is expounded in *Soul's Journey into God*, is an eschatology that is unique because notably absent from Franciscan eschatology is the theology of atonement. While Jesus' death on a cross is not denied, that he died for humanity's sin is not central to Franciscan spiritual theology. Rather, the incarnation as an expression of profound love and the Trinity as intimate relationship that spills over into all of creation are at the heart of Franciscan eschatology. Hayes describes the role of the incarnation from Bonaventure's perspective in this way:

...Bonaventure speaks of the potency that lies in humanity to receive the very personal self-communication of God; and herein lies the human condition for the possibility of an incarnation, for while there is a substantial difference between God and humanity, yet there is a *convenientia ordinis* between the rational creature and God which resides in the fact that human nature, by virtue of its spiritual dimension, has God not only as its creative cause, but as the personal goal of all its intellectual and appetitive strivings. The human person is first of all capable of the transformation of [his] personal being through the grace-filled encounter with God. But that same potency is the seat of a further possibility; namely, the communication of God through the personal union of human nature with the Son. Such a union, as the fullest realization of the most noble potency of creation, would bring the created order to its fullest realization.<sup>408</sup>

Therefore, the purpose of the incarnation was not primarily for Jesus to die a tragic death for humanity's sin. As seen above in Chapter four, the fourth step of Bonaventure's

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<sup>408</sup> Zachary Hayes, *The Hidden Center: Spirituality and Speculative Christology in St. Bonaventure* (New York: The Franciscan Institute, 2000), 161-162.

journey points to the power of grace to reform the human de-formed by sin. This raises the question of whether or not there would have been an incarnation if Jesus did not come to die for sins. The Franciscan answer is ‘yes’ because the purpose of the Incarnation is to share the supreme Good, the love of God, grace for humanity, and hope for humankind.

Normativity of the future focuses on the hope of an eschatological future in which all are included in a just community.<sup>409</sup> The second marker therefore asks if the understanding of the eschatological vision is inclusive, either explicitly or implicitly. In the Franciscan view, the question of inclusivity is answered in the previous paragraph. No one is excluded from God’s love. In the theology of conversion, Lonergan describes conversion as a shift in horizon. A previous horizon is stretched or replaced with a new horizon as one incorporates information and behavior into one’s identity. One’s vision for a way of life in the future is transformed to reach the new horizon.

Remembering that normativity of the future also pertains to the “text” of human experience; we turn to an example of conversion in initial formation to work out how conversion can imply a new horizon of inclusivity. If a woman enters religious life defining the vow of obedience as blindly doing what she is told to do by authority figures in the community, that particular horizon will likely be replaced when she understands (intellectual conversion) obedience as mutual listening to God, others and self in prayer and dialogue. Participation in this type of obedience implies inclusiveness within the community as members relate to one another with reciprocal integrity. Living obedience as a mutual relationship invites her to make choices (moral conversion) about how she expresses her personal power within the community. If her new understanding of

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid., 8.

obedience is grounded in her relationship with God (religious conversion) then she is able to recognize the movement of the Spirit. Out of these moments, she is able to experience conversion as Gelpi defines it. She becomes responsible for her personal and communal life and becomes accountable for how she lives out the vow of obedience. Ideally, then, her choices for ministry will have bearing on those who live on the margins of society. Thus, God's call and her commitment to that call lead her to participate in God's hope for the future with an attitude that all are loved by God and included in a gospel vision.

The third marker of normativity of the future is related to inclusivity. This area of inquiry concerns ethics and asks how moral choices might be prompted by the text. Here the question is how the charism of conversion leads to ethical choices. Both Lonergan and Gelpi have answered this in their descriptions of authentic conversion leading to actions congruent with that conversion. Gelpi's category of socio-political moral conversion particularly implies accountability to a community for one's ethical choices. Francis' life is a series of conversions that lead him to ethical choices aligned with his desire to imitate Christ. As he chose to live poverty and serve the poor, the normativity of the future in terms of ethics is that a person living out of Franciscan conversion will choose to offer solidarity and hope to those on the margins.

From a pneumatological perspective, the next marker looks at how a text reflects the Spirit, a sense of hope and shared relationship with God. The Franciscan charism of conversion by definition in the Third Order Regular Rule is rooted in a shared relationship with God. A deepening relationship with God emerges from acknowledging, adoring and serving God. The image of a spiral is helpful here. As one deepens her/his relationship with God in ways that lead to living the gospel in ethical choices, conversion

occurs. As conversion occurs in faithful acts, one's relationship with God deepens, and so on in a spiral. As Lonergan and Gelpi emphasized, authentic religious conversion cannot happen without the action of God's grace. No one converts in isolation, nor does conversion happen by sheer will.

Finally, normativity of the future is concerned with "meta questions" of a text. These questions explore issues of accountability, collaboration and especially the influence that the interpretation of the text might have on the marginalized and oppressed.<sup>410</sup> For our purposes, the "meta question" refers to the social analysis of post modernity. In what way might the charism of conversion bring gospel values into this wider picture in the future? *The Soul's Journey into God* gives a vision of profound communion among humanity, creation, and the all Good Trinity, a relationship that is rooted in the journey of conversion and presupposes accountability and collaboration in its communal character. Inclusion of all of creation and humanity is particular to the relational nature of the Trinity. For Franciscan life, this means giving priority to the poor, oppressed and marginalized in one's actions. When a person recognizes the reflection of God in all that God created; recognizes self and others as the graced image of God interiorly; and relates intimately to the immenseness of God in the Trinity, then one cannot help but act in accordance with the moral integrity required by that relationship, particularly with regard to the poor. *The Soul's Journey into God* is a vision of living in right relationship with all. The work exists in a medieval theological context, but its meaning for spirituality continues to be relevant. Bieringer and Elsbernd see the future relevance of ancient texts in this way:

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<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 19-21.

In this eschatological hermeneutic the task of the reading community with regard to the ancient text is not to repeat it, to reenact it as if it was a script for their lives. Nor is their task to find its timeless core to recontextualize it. In a very real sense the past text has passed and cannot be resuscitated. Perhaps one could say that the text does not have intrinsic but paradigmatic value. This means that the reading community has the task of reading and internalizing the ancient text as the first chapters of a chain novel of which they have to write the next chapter.”<sup>411</sup>

Third Order Franciscans have been writing the next chapters of the charism in their lived experience. More chapters are to come, though how they might look is uncertain.

Certainly the present world, in its beauty and its brokenness, calls this charism to the future.

### **Implications for a Practical Theology of Conversion**

The preceding chapters have examined the Third Order Franciscan charism of conversion from several significant, though not exhaustive, perspectives. These chapters highlight the place of human experience in Practical Theology while engaging a multi-disciplinary approach. Human experience is present throughout. The derivation of conversion as a charism is rooted in Francis’s own conversion experiences.

Bonaventure’s expression of Franciscan spiritual theology in *The Soul’s Journey into God* enhances the process of conversion in its description of the human person in intimate relationship with God. His description of this relationship is focused on the internal relationship of the Trinity as it communicates the Good with all of creation in its journey

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<sup>411</sup> Reimund Beiringer and Mary Elsbernd, *Normativity of the Future*, 10.

to completion in Christ. The journey marks three moments for the human person. Made in the image and likeness of God, the human person comes from God, lives in God and returns to God. Implicit in living this relationship is the need for wholeness, right relationship, community, and justice. While much of the medieval theology of Bonaventure may not resonate with modern-day readers (hierarchical ladders, seraphim, style of language), the journey of conversion found on the path of a growing intimacy with God as well as the way in which Bonaventure describes God (no gender, not personified, center everywhere with circumference nowhere) are valuable for contemporary adult faith formation and for lifelong conversion.

Franciscan conversion, then, is grounded in a continuously growing union with God. This is a primary implication of the research presented in this work. The research also implies that the post modern context of today is in need of gospel values and conversion. The theology of conversion itself implies change and transformation throughout life. It emerges from encounters and experiences that disrupt the familiar and comfortable. It requires openness to new information as well as the desire to learn and know as a way toward deeper understanding. Authentic conversion invites honest self-reflection, self-acceptance and intimate prayer that are reflected in moral and ethical choices. Making choices that align with gospel values gives freedom from the materialistic standards and values held in post modern culture. Commodification of persons is replaced by human dignity, making the well being of the poor a priority. Individualism, extreme privatization and fragmentation of relationships are replaced by shared power, mutuality, community and solidarity with the poor. The acquisition of wealth is replaced by the awareness that all belongs to God in the first place. Living a



Franciscan way of life through ongoing conversion makes room for all people and transcends the gap between the rich and the poor. Franciscan conversion leads one to the stance that all of creation relates to humanity as brother and sister.

### **Future of the Charism of Conversion**

Now we move to explore the value of the Franciscan charism of conversion for the present and future. As noted above, the charism of conversion grew out of the Vatican II mandate to renew religious life. In these fifty plus years after the renewal, Third Order Regular women religious have embraced and integrated this charism in their communal and ministerial lives. The Spirit has given life to the charism in the lives of these women and in the lives of those with whom they collaborate and minister. Also noted above in chapter two are characteristics of post modernity, the signs of the times in contemporary life. Amid great progress and technological advances, commodification around the globe has created an uneven distribution of resources for basic needs, as well as extreme violence and environmental crises that threatens the lives of people and the life of the planet. Though post modern life is far more complicated than the social challenges of the thirteenth century, Francis's conversion took place in the midst of a society with characteristics analogous to post modern society. His conversion moments prompted him to live the gospel by choosing poverty as a way of life and locating himself in solidarity among the poor on the margins. By following the gospel, he modeled right relationship even as the consumer culture of the merchant class grew around him.

Franciscan sisters today try to do the same. Even as the demographics of communities change, ongoing conversion is at the heart of mission. Rather than creating a crisis for these congregations, the diminution creates an open space for the creativity of

the Spirit. Religious life in the future won't look as it has in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but this does not mean extinction of religious life and especially does not mean the end of the Third Order charism. As Matura states in his assessment of post conciliar Franciscanism:

I cannot imagine that the Franciscan presence will disappear in our regions. I certainly see it as rarer: a few brothers or sisters grouped in small communities (numbering between six and ten), living their faith intensely, searching for God, in mutual love, openness to all, in a spirit of friendship and service and with the exclusion of all forms of superiority and domination, living from the work and gifts received, and not holding high positions either in Church or in society...is this not what the first fraternity lived? Post-Conciliar transformations in Franciscan Life, the conditions which impose themselves on us by the world and the life of the Church in our time, does it not offer a unique opportunity to live anew the freshness of the Franciscan adventure? To be small, without power or prestige, while at the same time peaceful, friendly, servants of all, isn't this the heart of the Franciscan vocation?<sup>412</sup>

Matura writes as a member of the Friars Minor, but his text is inclusive of all three of the major branches of the Franciscan family. Franciscan women's communities, though smaller, will continue to live the charism in smaller groups but perhaps with more collaborators.

Third Order Franciscan communities will look different than they do today. This charism, though, which is a grace from the Spirit, has a life of its own that is attractive

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<sup>412</sup> Thadee Matura, "Post-Conciliar Transformations in Franciscan Life," *The Cord* 58 (October/December, 2008), 353.

and still speaks to those searching for a gospel way of life in turbulent times. As Third Order Franciscans negotiate the current shifts in religious life, some are already finding ways to continue to be public witnesses of the gospel through ongoing conversion. While communities address the issues of becoming smaller (i.e. what to do with lands, buildings, resources), they are also asking what their purpose is at this time in history and into the future. In a world that needs transformation and conversion, what do Third Order Regular Franciscans offer?

To answer this question, we first look at the future role of religious life as a whole. Interviewed for a publication of LCWR, Peter Block, whose work is focused on community and transformation, shares some observations. According to Block, women's religious congregations exist in a "consumer driven, so called free-market enterprise that isn't working."<sup>413</sup> He goes on to say that women's communities offer an alternative to the status quo culture in that they, "are a role model for what leadership and imagination can look like in today's violent, poverty-stricken world."<sup>414</sup> In other words, simply by being faithful to their charisms, women religious offer an option for a way of life that is counter cultural. Block encourages women religious to live their charism, saying, "embody your gift, your grace, your power. What's required of you is to take in and integrate the grace and power you hold, and not measure yourselves according to the conventional market measurements of scale, speed, and size."<sup>415</sup> He says that the world is beginning to look for more ways to cooperate in living and working, which women religious have been practicing for years. Because religious lifestyles focus on sharing, generosity, and "non-

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<sup>413</sup> Annmarie Sanders, "An Interview with Peter Block: The Art of Asking Powerful Questions," LCWR Occasional Papers, 45, no.2 (Summer 2016): 15.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid.

monetized” values, this life has something to say to a broken down capitalistic economy. Block gets at a core issue of post modernity in one simple statement: “The woundedness and the violence that we see in the world are responses to the broken economic system.”<sup>416</sup> The charisms of religious life offer opportunities for creativity and hope as women religious and their collaborators look for approaches to build right relationships.

Through a life of ongoing conversion, Franciscan women’s communities offer a distinctive approach that resonates with Block’s vision of women religious as agents of transformation. To examine this approach, we return to the Third Order Rule’s definition of the charism and its potential influence on post modernity. In the first of this three dimensions of conversion, *acknowledging God*, the Franciscan world view breaks through the fragmentation of society in that it sees God in every aspect of life. Per *Soul’s Journey into God*, all of creation and the entire cosmos is a reflection of the divine and represents this unity. The brokenness of the economy and society violates the unity of creation. Right relationship (communal nature of Trinity) is in jeopardy.

This awareness leads to the second and third moments of *adoring God* and *serving God*. In contemporary language, the word adore may have a connotation of superficiality. In this context, however, adoring God is an expression of intimate relationship found in prayer, contemplation and reflection on one’s relationship with God. As prayer deepens the relationship between self and God, one becomes aware of the personal and communal responsibilities of maintaining integrity in that relationship. When such reflection recognizes the brokenness of God’s creation, then one may be led to action or service, the third dimension of Third Order conversion. Franciscan service is

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 16.

relational and flows from evangelical life. It includes aligning with the poor and marginalized; working for justice and peace, and caring for the environment.

### **Pastoral Practices for Animation of the Charism**

#### **Model for Animating the Charism: Dubuque Franciscans**

For the purposes of suggesting activities and processes for inspiring the continued life of the charism, the following section will examine specific aspects of the current mission of the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, Iowa.

First, a very brief history of the community is in order. The Franciscan Sisters of Dubuque originated in Hereford, Germany in 1864. In 1875, Bismarck enacted the May laws which gave religious congregations the choice of disbanding or going into exile. Mother Xavier Termehr and twenty-eight sisters left Germany to settle first in Iowa City, Iowa and then Dubuque, Iowa. The original work of the sisters was care for elderly, care for orphans and various other forms of health care. The congregational history is filled with accounts of ministries in education, health care, among immigrants and the poor both in the United States and abroad. In addition to the United States, sisters have ministered in China, Chile, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, St. Lucia, and several African countries. The congregation went through the growing pains of Vatican II renewal, exchanging habits for lay clothing, gradually moving out of traditional institutional ministries, and growing in understanding of Francis, Clare and the charism of ongoing conversion. At the same time, the community has experienced the reality of fewer members and an aging membership. While some new members have come to discern a religious vocation, few have remained in the community. Nevertheless, the integration and vitality of the charism continues to bear fruit in the community's mission.

## **Mission and Charism in the Dubuque Franciscans**

In these post conciliar years of grappling with the lived experience of community and ministry, Franciscan scholarship and congregational history, this particular community came to a self-understanding that is reflected in their current mission statement:

Rooted in the Gospel and in the spirit of Francis and Clare, the Sisters of St. Francis live in right relationship with all creation.

In our personal, communal and public lives, the Sisters of St. Francis commit to ongoing conversion as we:

- deepen our relationship with Mother Earth and Sister Water;
- stand with persons who are poor;
- and make peace and practice non-violence.

This is who we are; this is what the global community can expect from us.<sup>417</sup>

After many congregational chapters in which the community articulated and re-articulated mission statements, this statement became effective in 2008 and has continued to be an accurate reflection of the identity and mission of the Dubuque Franciscans.

However, the first sentence of the statement came out in 2004 as the mission statement and then was expanded by the Chapter of 2008. The components of the statement reflect the relational nature of Franciscanism. The relationship with Francis and Clare as models for following Christ is core to the community's identity. Franciscan gospel life and living in right relationship with creation echo Bonaventure's spiritual theology of Francis in which every component of creation reflects the Trinitarian God. The commitment to the Third Order charism of conversion is explicit and is clearly meant to be shared in service that cares for the planet, addresses the needs of those on the margins, and works towards

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<sup>417</sup> Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, accessed February 2, 2017, <http://www.osfdbq.org/>.

nonviolence and peace. The importance of relationship is especially highlighted in the last statement. The Dubuque Franciscans want a relationship of accountability to God and the people of God.

In this mission statement, the implications of the Third Order Rule's understanding of conversion and the theology of conversion are present. The statement implicitly points the way to acknowledging God in creation, adoring God in contemplation, and serving God in the global community. At the same time, the commitment to ongoing conversion necessitates keeping up with knowledge of post modern issues for the sake of intellectual conversion. It also requires reflection that leads to choices regarding where to minister and how to use financial resources for the sake of moral conversion. Both contribute to religious conversion in the faithful, radical dependence on God individually, as a community, and in the global community.

The mission statement was informed by a community project that was initiated two years after the first iteration was promulgated. In 2006, many sisters felt the discomfort that often comes from talking about something but never moving to action. The Dubuque Franciscan Sister Water Project grew out of the desire to address the need for clean water in many impoverished countries. According to their web site, "The Sisters of St. Francis, with support from their associates, launched the Sister Water Project in 2006 to bring safe water to villages in Tanzania and Honduras. The sisters spent months studying, discussing and praying about global water issues to fulfill their mission statement of 'living in right relationship with all of creation.'"<sup>418</sup> To date, the Sister Water Project has raised one million dollars, has provided for over 130 wells in Tanzania

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

and over 20 water systems in Honduras.<sup>419</sup> The community has partnered with the people of these two countries and other organizations, modeling the values of collaboration and widespread generosity. Over the years, several teams of sisters and associates have gone to Honduras to dig the trenches for the water pipes alongside the local people.

Involvement in this project has been an impetus for conversion within the community and among many others who have participated.

### **Charism Team: Animating the Charism**

As the community lived into the mission statement, the value of the charism became more prominent. In 2010, the leadership team put a new vision for the sharing the charism into action. They formed a charism team. The team gathered together under one umbrella congregational ministries which traditionally had been separate. The common ground of these ministries is that they promote the charism, but through different pathways. The team is comprised of five members, both sisters and lay women and includes the directors of vocations (renamed inviting and discerning ministry), initial formation, lay associates and the congregational volunteer program (Franciscan Common Venture). While each team member continues to minister within her particular area, the team members also support the ministries of each other and enter into some common ministry together. The most important underlying factor of the activities of this team is the focus on conversion. Each area in which the charism team ministers attempts to provide the resources and practices that could lead to ongoing conversion in the people with whom they engage. The goal of the team is to build relationships and provide experiences that promote a way of life that embraces gospel values through ongoing

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid.



conversion. The result has been a growing number of people participating in the mission of the congregation beyond vowed membership.

### **Franciscan Way of Life: Charism Formation**

The team holds one aspect of their ministry in common. Collaborating with one another, the team members developed a program for fostering the charism and Franciscan values among a variety of populations. The program is aptly named the *Franciscan Way of Life*. The goal of the program is to provide ways for a wide cross section of people to integrate the charism into their own lives. The program is structured as a two year process in which participants meet once a month to learn about Francis, Clare, and the values that guide this way of life. Facilitators are trained to use the materials and to guide the participants. Each month, the groups are given an article (intellectual conversion) to read for the next meeting along with reflection questions (leads to moral conversion). Faith sharing occurs during the session. Facilitators encourage participants to find the ways in which the topics are relevant to their faith lives and the global community to which they belong (religious conversion). Over time, the group begins to share on a personal level and forms a community. Each year also provides the opportunity to take part in an immersion experience. The members are encouraged to engage in some form of service with the poor, preferably an experience that is out of their comfort zone. The goal is to have an experience that disturbs, creates questions and prompts reflection and prayer. Afterward, the group members share a session in which they examine their experiences in light of the gospel and in light of Franciscan values. The focus is less on what service they provided and more on how the experience was uniquely Franciscan and brought conversion to their lives intellectually, morally and spiritually.

Franciscan Way of Life is open to anyone from any faith tradition. For some, it is a preparation for a more formal relationship with the congregation. Currently, the Franciscan Way of Life is the formation program for anyone who wants to become an associate. Women in the early stages of discernment for vowed life are encouraged to participate in the program when possible. However, if someone enters the congregation without prior participation in the Franciscan Way of Life, then she participates as part of her candidate formation. Thus, this program is a formation tool that assists others in embracing conversion as a way of life. To this end, the second year of the program includes a formal discernment about what might be one's next step in living the charism and Franciscan values in her/his life.<sup>420</sup> To date, groups have been formed on one college campus, in parishes, in areas where sisters have a ministerial presence, as well as in collaboration with the congregation's spirituality center and retreat house. Many who became associates before the program was established have chosen to participate as part of their own ongoing conversion.

### **Franciscan Associates: Charism in the Marketplace**

In 1984, the Dubuque Franciscans established an associate program, which also grew out of the Vatican II renewal mandate to collaborate with the laity. At first, former members asked for an associate relationship, and then other women and men followed. Embracing Franciscan life, associates remain financially independent while sharing in the charism through relationships with sisters and through their own work in the world. Sisters and associates form bonding groups for “mutual support and challenge, shared prayer, broadened vision, common mission and values, growth in Franciscanism, and the

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<sup>420</sup> See Appendix B and C

creation of community.”<sup>421</sup> Associates are able to embrace the charism of conversion by their committed participation in the mission of the Dubuque Franciscans and are significant collaborators as they extend the mission in their work places, among family and friends, and in connection with projects that support the mission (i.e., Sister Water Project, Human Trafficking Committee). Currently, Dubuque Franciscan Associates span both the United States and Central America.

### **Franciscan Common Venture: Charism on the Margins**

Another way that the charism of conversion is animated through the ministry of the Charism team is through the volunteer program, Franciscan Common Venture. The program began in 1971 as a six week summer program in which large numbers of young women and sisters formed teams who went to give service among the poor in the United States. The goals of the program at that time were “prayer, community and service.”<sup>422</sup> In time the length of service was decreased to five weeks, and the program grew smaller because fewer sisters were available to participate due to twelve month ministries (rather than a school calendar) and fewer young women were available for the entire summer because they need jobs to pay for college. Eventually the program was discontinued and then revived nine years later in its current form. Throughout its history, sisters and lay people have served the poor and marginalized through Common Venture, which reflexively added to the eventual articulation of the charism. Today, the program offers short term (several days to a week) and long term volunteer (several months to a year) options within the United States and Central America. To enhance the goals of

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<sup>421</sup> Jordan Dahm, *A Common Heart: The Dubuque Franciscans Faith Journey 1975-2000* (Dubuque: Quebecor Printing Dubuque, Inc., 2000), 38.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

community, prayer and service, the recently developed reflection component of the program invites participants to view their experiences through a Franciscan lens and to attend to their own experience of conversion in encounters on the margins. The director of the program provides orientation for volunteers before they go to their sites and assists them in theological and personal reflection during and after the experience. For long term volunteers, the director also provides ongoing support through regular communication with them, particularly when the volunteer is crossing cultures.<sup>423</sup>

### **Inviting and Discerning Ministry: Planting the Seeds of the Charism**

Within the charism team, vocation ministry is in the process of shifting from a recruitment model to a model for inviting not only single young women, but a broader population of women and men to engage the charism. While entering into the traditional visits to college campuses for Busy Persons Retreats and other college programs, this ministry also focuses on planting seeds in children and teens through retreats and days of reflection. Since young people have limited experiences with sisters, one goal is to involve the sisters in these programs as much as possible. Some programs are held at the mother house while for others, the vocation ministers go to schools or Religious Education programs. The broader perspective of the ministry is that of inviting others not only to vowed membership but also to become associates and/or participate in Franciscan Common Venture. Generally speaking, inviting and discerning ministers encourage others to participate in the charism.

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<sup>423</sup> See Appendix D

## **Recommendations**

No doubt, there are many more pastoral practices that could be created and implemented for the sake of ongoing conversion. Based on the above chapters and examples, several recommendations for the potential animation of the charism of ongoing conversion are in order. Franciscans Third Order communities need to:

1. Recognize the gift of the charism that is theirs to embrace and share with the world and discern ways to do so.
2. Build relationships and form community with diverse peoples (ages, races, classes, religions, etc.).
3. Provide opportunities for associates and other collaborators to engage in relationships with the poor through ongoing service and engagement with post modern issues.
4. Provide ways for others to pray with and study Franciscan values.

Each of these offers the opportunity for ongoing conversion. Ultimately, conversion is the work of the Spirit, but it is the work of those who carry the charism to invite and make space for the Spirit to move in and through the building up of the relationships in the Body of Christ.

## **Conclusions**

Christian life began with Jesus' invitation to repent and believe in the reign of God. His was an invitation to a way that was and is the normativity of the future. Francis followed Jesus' way in a gradual and total conversion that was emulated by his followers and expressed in the spiritual theology of Bonaventure. The Franciscan Common Novitiate and the Dubuque Franciscan Charism Team offer models for pastoral

approaches to animate the charism. The basic suggestion emerging from this model is to create ways to develop relationships with individuals and groups who find the charism both needed and attractive, leading them to lives of ongoing conversion. Today, as people search for meaning in the complexities of post modernity, Franciscan communities offer an alternative to the culture of commodification in our experience of living the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The power, social status, politics and economics associated with globalization stand in stark contrast to the Franciscan life of seeing everything as coming from God, reflective of God, and meant for all to respect and share. Now more than ever, the world needs this charism.

## Appendix A

The following offers a text comparison of the conversion moments of St. Francis of Assisi from the biographies of St. Francis written by Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure. With the exception of one noted below, the passages from Celano come from *The Life of St. Francis* by Celano and *The Major Legend* by Bonaventure

### Conversion to Non-violence

#### Celano

“...he vowed out of vainglory and vanity, to do great deeds. A certain nobleman from the city of Assisi was furnishing himself on a large scale with military weaponry and, swollen by the wind of empty glory, he asserted solemnly that he was going to Apulia to enrich himself in money or distinction. When Francis heard of this, because he was whimsical and overly daring, he agreed to go with him. Although Francis did not equal him in nobility of birth, he did outrank him in graciousness; and though poorer in wealth, he was richer in generosity.

One night, after Francis had devoted himself with all of his determination to accomplish these things and was eager, seething with desire, to make the journey, the One who had struck him with the rod of justice visited him in a vision during the night in the sweetness of grace. Because he was eager for glory, the Lord exalted and enticed him to its pinnacle. For it seemed to him that his whole house was filled with soldiers' arms: saddles, shields, spears and other equipment. Though delighting for the most part, he silently wondered to himself about its meaning. For he was not accustomed to see such things in his house, but rather stacks of cloth to be sold. He was greatly bewildered at the sudden turn of events and the response that all these arms were to be for him and his soldiers. With a happy spirit he awoke the next morning. Considering his vision a

prediction of great success, he felt sure that his upcoming journey to Apulia would be successful. In fact he did not know what he was saying, and as yet did not understand the gift sent to him from heaven. He should have been able to see that his interpretation of it was mistaken. For, although the vision bore some semblance of great deeds, his spirit was not moved by these things in its usual way. In fact, he had to force himself to carry out his plans and undertake the journey he had desired...

Changed in mind but not in body, he now refused to go to Apulia and was anxious to direct his will to God's." (Book 1,Chapter II-III)

### **Bonaventure**

"The following night when he had fallen asleep, the divine kindness showed him a large and splendid palace with military arms emblazoned with the insignia of Christ's cross. Thus it vividly indicated that the mercy he had exhibited to a poor knight for love of the supreme King would be repaid with an incomparable reward. When he asked to whom these belonged, the response he received from on high was that all these things were for him and his knights. Therefore, on waking up in the morning, since he was not yet disciplined in penetrating the divine mysteries and did not know how to pass through the visible appearance to conduit the invisible truth, he assessed the unusual vision to be a judgment of great prosperity in the future. For this reason, still ignorant of the divine plan, he set out to join a generous count in Apulia, hoping in his service to obtain the glory of knighthood, as his vision foreshadowed.

Shortly after he had embarked on this journey and gone as far as the neighboring city, he heard the Lord speaking to him during the night in a familiar way: 'Francis, who can do more for you, a lord or a servant, a rich person or one who is poor?' When Francis replied that a lord and a rich



person could do more, he was at once asked: ‘Why then are you abandoning the Lord for a servant and the rich God for a poor mortal?’ And Francis replied, ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’ And the Lord answered him: ‘Go back to your own land, because the vision which you have seen prefigures a spiritual outcome which will be accomplished in you not by a human but by a divine plan.’ (Chapter 1)

### **Conversion in the Encounter with the Leper**

#### **Celano**

“...For he used to say that the sight of lepers was so bitter to him that in the days of his vanity when he saw their houses even two miles away, he would cover his nose with his hands.

When he started thinking of holy and useful matters with the grace and strength of the Most High, while still in the clothes of the world, he met a leper one day. Made stronger than himself, he came up and kissed him. He then began to consider himself less and less, until by the mercy of the Redeemer, he came to complete victory over himself.” (Book 1, Chapter VI)

#### **Bonaventure**

“One day, therefore, while he was riding his horse through the plain that lies below the city of Assisi, he met a leper. This unforeseen encounter struck him with not a little horror. Recalling the plan of perfection he had already conceived in his mind, and remembering that he must first conquer himself if he wanted to become a knight of Christ, he dismounted from his horse and ran to kiss him. As the leper stretched out his hand as if to receive something, he gave him money with a kiss. Immediately mounting his horse, however, and turning around, even though the open plain stretched clear in all directions, he could not see the leper anywhere. He began, therefore,

filled with wonder and joy, to sing praises to the Lord, while proposing because of this, to embark always on the greater.” (Chapter 1)

### **Conversion through Prayer**

#### **Celano**

Note: The account of the San Damiano Cross does not appear in “The Life of St. Francis.”

However, it appears in Celano’s second Life of Francis, *The Remembrance of a Desire of a Soul*:

“...he was walking one day by the church of San Damiano which was abandoned by everyone and almost in ruins. Led by the Spirit, he went to pray and knelt down devoutly before the crucifix. He was shaken by unusual experiences and discovered that he was different from when he had entered. As soon as he had this feeling, there occurred something unheard of in previous ages: with the lips of the painting, the image of Christ crucified spoke to him. ‘Francis’ it said calling him by name, ‘go rebuild My house as you see it is all being destroyed.’ Francis was more than a little stunned, trembling, and stuttering like a man out of his senses. He prepared himself to obey and pulled himself together to carry out the command. He felt this mysterious change in himself, but he could not describe it.” (The First Book, Chapter VI)

#### **Bonaventure**

“He then began to seek out solitary places, favorable to grieving where, with unutterable groans, he concentrated incessantly on meriting to be heard by the Lord after the long perseverance of his prayers.(534)

“For one day when Francis went out to meditate in the fields, he walked near the church of San Damiano which was threatening to collapse because of age. Impelled by the Spirit, he went

inside to pray. Prostrate before an image of the Crucified, he was filled with no little consolation as he prayed. While his tear-filled eyes were gazing at the Lord's cross, he heard with his bodily ears a voice coming from that cross, telling him three times: 'Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is all being destroyed.'

Trembling, Francis was stunned at the sound of such an astonishing voice, since he was alone in the church; and as he absorbed the power of the divine words into his heart, he fell into an ecstasy of mind. At last, coming back to himself, he prepared himself to obey and pulled himself together to carry out the command of repairing the material church, although the principal intention of the works referred to that which Christ purchased with his own blood, as the Holy Spirit taught him and as he himself later disclosed to the brothers." (Chapter 2)

### **Conversion through Scripture**

#### **Celano**

"After him, brother Bernard, embracing the delegation of peace, eagerly ran after the holy man of God to gain the kingdom of heaven. He had often received the blessed father as a guest, had observed and tested his life and conduct. Refreshed by the fragrance of his holiness, he conceived fear and gave birth to the spirit of salvation. He used to see him praying all night long, sleeping rarely, praising God and the glorious Virgin, His mother. He was amazed and said, 'This man truly is from God.' So he hurried to sell all he had and distributed it to the poor, not to his relatives. Grasping the title of a more perfect way, he fulfilled the counsel of the holy gospel: 'If you wish to be perfect, go and sell all you own, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When he had done this, he joined the holy man, Francis in the

same life and habit, and was always with him, until the brothers increased in number and he, with the obedience of his devoted father, was sent to other regions.” (Book 1, Chapter X)

### **Bonaventure**

“When morning had broken they went into the church of Saint Nicholas, and after they had prepared with a prayer, Francis, a worshiper of the Trinity, opened the book of the Gospels three times asking God to confirm Bernard’s plan with a threefold testimony. At the first opening of the book this text appeared: If you will be perfect, go, sell all that you have, and give to the poor. At the second: Take nothing on your journey. And at the third: I anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. This is our life and rule, the holy man said, and that of all who wish to join our company. Go, then, if you wish to be perfect, and carry out what you have heard.’ (Chapter 3)

### **Conversion to Poverty**

#### **Celano**

“When the father saw that he could not recall him from the journey he had begun, he became obsessed with recovering the money. The man of God had desired to spend it on feeding the poor and on the buildings of that place. But the one who did not love money could not be deceived even this appearance of good, and the one who was not bound by any affection for it was not disturbed in any way by its loss. The greatest scorner of the things of earth and the outstanding seeker of heavenly riches had thrown it into the dust on the windowsill. When the money was found, the rage of his angry father was dampened a little and his thirst greed was quenched a bit by its discovery. Then he led the son to the bishop of the city to make him renounce into the

bishop's hands all rights of inheritance and return everything that he had. Not only did he not refuse this, but he hastened joyfully and eagerly to do what was demanded.

When he was in front of the bishop, he neither delayed nor hesitated, but immediately took off and threw down all his clothes and returned them to his father. He did not even keep his trousers on, and he was completely stripped before everyone. The bishop, observing his frame of mind and admiring his fervor and determination, got up and, gathering him in his own arms, covered him with the mantle he was wearing. He clearly understood that this was prompted by God and he knew that the action of the man of God, which he had personally observed, contained a mystery. After this he became his helper. Cherishing and comforting him, he embraced the depths of charity.”(Book 1, Chapter VI)

### **Bonaventure**

“Thereupon, the father of the flesh worked on leading the child of grace, now stripped of his money, before the bishop of the city that he might renounce his family possessions into his hands and return everything he had. The true lover of poverty showed himself eager to comply and went before the bishop without delaying or hesitating. He did not wait for any words nor did he speak any, but immediately took off his clothes and gave them back to his father. Then it was discovered that the man of God had a hair shirt next to his skin under his fine clothes. Moreover, drunk with remarkable fervor, he even took off his trousers, and was completely stripped naked before everyone. He said to his father: ‘Until now I have called you father here on earth, but now I can say without reservation, ‘Our Father who art in heaven,’ since I have placed all my treasure and all my hope in him.’ The bishop, recognizing and admiring such intense fervor in the man of God, immediately stood up and in tears drew him into his arms, covering him with the mantle

that he was wearing. Like the pious and good man that he was, he bade his servants give him something to cover his body. They brought him a poor, cheap cloak of a farmer who worked for the bishop, which he accepted gratefully and, with his own hand, marked a cross on it with a piece of chalk, thus designating it as a covering of a crucified and half-naked poor man.”

(Chapter 2)

### **Conversion in the Stigmata**

#### **Celano**

“ While he was staying in that hermitage called La Verna, after the place where it is located, two years prior to the time that he returned his soul to heaven, he saw in the vision of God a man, having six wings like a Seraph, standing over him, arms extended and feet joined, affixed to a cross... When the blessed servant of the most High saw these things, he was filled with the greatest of awe, but could not decide what this vision meant for him. Moreover, he greatly rejoiced and was much delighted by the kind and gracious look that he saw the Seraph gave him. The Seraph’s beauty was beyond comprehension, but the fact that the Seraph was fixed to the cross and the bitter suffering of that passion thoroughly frightened him. Consequently, he got up both sad and happy as joy and sorrow took their turns in his heart. Concerned over the matter, he kept thinking about what the vision could mean and his spirit was anxious to discern a sensible meaning from the vision.

While he was unable to perceive anything clearly understandable from the vision, its newness very much pressed upon his hear. Signs of the nails began to appear on his hands and feet, just as he had seen them a little while earlier on the crucified man hovering over him.

His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the middle by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner part of his hands and on the upper part of his feet, and their points protruding on opposite sides. Those marks on the inside of his hands were round, but rather oblong on the outside; and small pieces of flesh were visible like the points of nails, bent over, flattened, extending beyond the flesh around them. On his feet, the marks of the nails were stamped in the same way and raised above the surrounding flesh. His right side was marked with an oblong scar, as if pierced with a lance, and this often dripped blood, so that his tunic and undergarments were frequently stained with his holy blood.” (Book 2, Chapter 3)

### **Bonaventure**

On a certain morning about the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, while Francis was praying on the mountainside, he saw a Seraph having six wings, fiery as well as brilliant, descend from the grandeur of heaven... Seeing this, he was overwhelmed and his heart was flooded with a mixture of joy and sorrow. He rejoiced at the gracious way Christ looked upon him under the appearance of the Seraph, but the fact that he was fastened to a cross pierced his soul with a sword of compassionate sorrow... Eventually he understood from this, through the Lord revealing it, that Divine Providence had shown him a vision of this sort so that the friend of Christ might learn in advance that he was to be totally transformed in the likeness of Christ crucified, not by the martyrdom of his flesh, but by the enkindling of his soul. As the vision was disappearing, it left in his heart a marvelous fire and imprinted in his flesh a likeness of signs no less marvelous.

For immediately the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet just as he had seen a little before in the figure of the man crucified. His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the center by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner side of the hands and the

upper side of the feet and their points on the opposite sides, the heads of the nails in his hands and his feet were round and black; their points oblong and bent as if driven back with a hammer, and they emerged from the flesh and stuck out beyond it. Also his right side, as if pierced with a lance, was marked with a red wound from which his sacred blood often flowed, moistening his tunic and underwear.” (Chapter 13)



## **Appendix B**

### **Discernment Process for Living the Franciscan Way of Life**

#### **Why a Discernment Process?**

When a person expresses an interest in living a Franciscan way of life, a discernment process assists the Franciscan Way of Life participant to clarify what she/he is asking for and lays a foundational support to seek a direction in her/his life.

#### **What is Discernment?**

Discernment is listening to what God is doing in one's life, to where God is leading. We are to be "discerning listeners" before we make a decision for our lives. Discernment is integral in our turning points in life as well as an ongoing process throughout life. To "discern the spirits" (I Corinthians 12:10) is to know where the Holy Spirit is leading us.

Discernment is a process before making a decision. Discerning is choosing among several good options. When a decision is made after discerning, there may be a loss or letting go of other good options.

#### **Wholistic Approach to Discernment**

A wholistic (holistic) approach to discernment involves the whole self: mind, emotions, body, intuition, imagination, values and dreams. A wholistic approach involves the outer authority (wisdom of the faith community and the traditions) and the inner authority (experiences and experience of God) with a balance of mind, heart and intuition.

## Appendix C

### Discernment Questions for Reflection

#### **Ongoing Conversion is the overall Charism of the Franciscan Way of Life**

During the past two years we have focused on the Franciscan values and on-going conversion in our lives.

1. How have the values of poverty, Incarnation-Christ with us, humility, contemplation, peacemaking, community, joy and care for creation lead you to conversion? How have they become more evident in your life?
2. How has your prayer life been influenced? Changed? How has it transformed you?
3. How have you become more engaged with the global world? Local city community? Your neighborhood? Your family?
4. At this time, what is your hope for the future: become an Associate? A yearlong volunteer? A full time member of the congregation? Hang loose as a follower of St. Francis and St. Clare.

We do not discern in a vacuum. Where has your personal reflection led you? How are you being drawn to live these values? We strongly encourage you to talk this over with your family, a friend, or someone from the FWL group.

Please send a **written response** to the above three questions before the next Franciscan Way of Life session. You may either send your written response via email or snail mail.

You will be encouraged to thoughts from your discernment process with the participants at your next FWL session

AND

when the team receives your written response, one of us will arrange a time to meet with you to have a discernment conversation.

## Appendix D

### Common Venture: Immersion in Life Among the Poor

#### Franciscan Common Venture Values

- **Community:** Volunteers make a commitment to a shared way of life that supports, encourages and challenges each person to grow.
- **Simple Living:** FCV invites volunteers to live a simple lifestyle and to be reflective about the use of money, time and material possessions.
- **Prayer:** Faith sharing, reflection on the day's experience and group prayer are a regular part of the shared life.
- **Standing with people who are poor:** FCV provided volunteers an opportunity to live out this value while serving in a variety of church agencies.
- **Social Justice:** FCV volunteers, motivated by faith, take an active part in the healing of a hurting and troubled world. Challenged by the causes of injustice, volunteers search for creative solutions and faith-filled responses.

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