

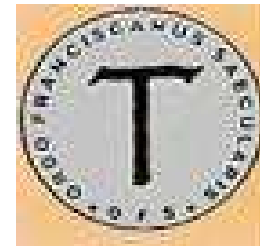
(Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life*, 27)

The Franciscan vocation is to preach the Gospel with our lives, to en flesh Christ in this world. Francis of Assisi preached the Gospel with his life. He encountered the living and active person of Christ in his brothers and sisters. He challenged the false values of the 13th Century by actively and courageously changing his own life-style, attitudes, and values. He affected changes within the structure of Mediaeval society and the Church. He loved so intensely that he is known as the 'Seraphic Lover'. **THIS IS THE VOCATION OF SECULAR FRANCISCANS TODAY.**

## **Spirituality for the Laity: A Secular Franciscan Perspective**

by Donna Marie Kaminsky OFS

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SECULARITY, secularism, 'flight from the world' by lay people, the 'derealisation of the laity', lay formation, and lay spirituality are some of the issues raised in the *lineamenta*, the document released from the Vatican's Synod Secretariat in preparation for the 1987 world Synod of Bishops. The synod theme was: "Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World 20 years After the Second Vatican Council". The *lineamenta*, not a 'complete and organic treatment of the theme of the laity' was intended to promote discussion and consultation on the synod's theme in local churches throughout the world. Most dioceses, in response to this document, initiated some type of listening process to gather input from the laity to accomplish this consultation. Consequently, and as a result of the mushrooming articles today on lay ministry or spirituality for the laity, there can be no authentic discussion of the Secular Franciscan vocation without first considering the documents of Vatican II, the New Code of Canon Law, the *lineamenta* and the responses to it, as well the current discussions regarding the meaning of the terms laity, spirituality, secularity, and ministry—all of which are interrelated. Having a clear understanding of these terms, however, presupposes an adequate theology of the laity, or more precisely, a theology of the secular. Yves Congar OP succinctly situated the central problem of developing a theology of the laity and notes it goes beyond the sum of the many specific questions raised such as: (1) the relations of the Church with the world; (2) an up-to-date pastoral theology; (3) formation of the clergy and the meaning of their priesthood; (4) the nature of the laity's obligation; and (5) the Christian meaning of history and of earthly realities. "The real difficulty," asserts Congar, whose major pre-conciliar works [with those of Karl Rahner SJ and Edward Schillebeeckx OP] became the focal points for the

Francis of Assisi was an active contemplative, and a contemplative actor. He knew that fruitful action was born of discipline and silence and solitude. He not only encouraged the friars to a voluntary life of intense prayer (the *Rule of the Hermitages*), he himself spent months in the hermitage. In Celano's *Second Life*, Francis is giving advice to the friar preachers: "The preacher must first draw from secret prayers what he will later pour out in holy sermons; he must first grow hot within before he speaks words that are in themselves cold." (II Cel, 163) And in the *Legend of the Three Companions* (L3C, 58): "Since you speak of peace, all the more so must you have it in your hearts. Let none be provoked to anger or scandal by you, but rather may they be drawn to peace and good will, to benignity and concord through your gentleness. We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way." Francis exhorts the friars to **BE LOVE, BE PEACE, BE GENTLENESS**. Von Balthasar writes of this vocation to love: "Let there be no doubt. We are here to love—to love God and to love our neighbour. Whoever will unravel the meaning of existence must accept this fundamental principle from whose centre light is shed on all the dark recesses of our lives. For this love to which we are called is not a circumscribed or limited love, not a love defined, as it were, by measure of our human weakness. It does not allow us to submit just one part of our lives to its demands and leave the rest free for other pursuits; it does not allow us to dedicate just one period of our lives to it and the rest, if we will, to our own interests. The command to love is universal and makes demands upon everything in our nature: 'with thy whole heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind'."



**The Franciscan vocation is to preach the Gospel with our lives, to en flesh Christ in this world.**

### Contemplation

“As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.” (Rule, 8)

Thomas Merton defined the contemplative life as one of prayer, solitude, silence and meditation, and questioned if it could have any meaning for the person in the atomic age. Before answering the question, he further clarified what he meant by the ‘contemplative’ life.

“When I speak of the contemplative life, I do not mean the institutional cloistered life, the organised life of prayer...I am talking about a special dimension of inner discipline and experience, a certain integrity and fullness of personal development, which are not compatible with a purely external, alienated, busy-busy existence. This does not mean that they are incompatible with action, with creative work, with dedicated love. On the contrary, these all go together. A certain depth of disciplined experience is a necessary ground for fruitful action.” (Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action*, 172)

theological evaluation of specifics in lay life, “is that such a theology supposes the existence of a whole ecclesiological synthesis wherein the mystery of the Church has been given all its dimensions, including fully the ecclesial reality of laity. It is not just a matter of adding a paragraph or a chapter to an ecclesiological exposition which from beginning to end ignores the principles on which a ‘laicology’ really depends. Without those principles, we should have, confronting a laicised world, only a clerical Church, which would not be the People of God in the fullness of its truth. At bottom, there can only be one sound and sufficient theology of the laity, and that is a ‘total eccesiology...it will also be an anthropology, and even a theology of the creation in its relation to Christology.’”

(Yves Congar OP, *Lay People In The Church*, XVI, XVII)

Although the years during the Council and immediately afterward were characterised by enthusiasm for the newly developed roles and opportunities for the average Catholic woman and man, still there were doubts and questions regarding the direction increased involvement of the laity should take. A crucial question underlying these doubts was precisely the relationship between the laity and hierarchy, that is, how to maintain a strong, clear understanding of the hierarchy’s role while fostering creative responsibilities for the laity.

Several theological positions on the laity emerged from the Second Vatican Council which are the underlying basis for specific approaches to Christian lay life, and which have impacted upon the Pauline OFS Rule.

## Ecclesial Presence to the World

This viewpoint sees the layperson who does not belong to the hierarchy, nor a religious community, as an active member of the ecclesial people of God and as one who is called to incarnate herself/himself as a sacrament of the world in the specific circumstances of secular life. It affirms the intrinsic goodness of the world and recognises that the Church indeed has a mission in this sphere. Thus, through the everyday work of being a lawyer or labourer, factory worker or farmer, teacher or typist, homemaker or office worker, the layperson is enfleshing Christ in the market place, affirming that the world is good and imbuing it with the goodness of Christ.

St Francis clearly perceived this goodness of all creation and all created persons. For Francis there was never any distinction in the call to live the Gospel. Both Celano and Bonaventure write that Francis accepted all persons into the way of life preached, “members of both sexes, clerics and lay-folk, married and single.” (I Cel 37; *Major Life* 4,6)

The Secular Franciscan Rule concretises this relationship among Franciscan families: “The Franciscan family...unites all members of the people of God—laity, religious and priests—who recognise that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi.” (Rule, 1) There is present, then, in our family heritage that very sense of belonging to each other and to the Church as church. Along with this awareness, however, goes the challenge and responsibility of living out this interdependence by consciously joining and working together in various ministries.

values in her/his personal life, *and* in the world while looking forward to the ultimate relationship of union with God. Secularity restores the wholistic perspective of creation, wedding religious and secular, spiritual and temporal.

As Franciscans, we imitate St Francis who so closely imitated and resembled Jesus Christ that Francis is known as the Second Christ, or the Mirror of Christ. The Secular Franciscan vocation to integrate the charism of Francis is no less serious or intense than our sister and brother Franciscans who have chosen to love a fraternal life professing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. We, as they, must identify the values of Francis' charism, grapple with them, and search out ways to give concrete expressions to them in the daily reality of our contemporary lives, in our family circumstances and our occupations. We have wrongly assumed that penance, fraternity, minority, contemplation, poverty and obedience are 'religious' values; that Secular Franciscans need not (therefore, do not) grapple with these in their 'secular' life. We have inherited the dualistic thinking that somehow there is a dichotomy between secular and spiritual. The truth is, however, that the above values are Franciscan values. It is precisely the difficulties that continuously growing in these values presents to us that is our 'asceticism', our spirituality. That Secular Franciscans may concretely express these values differently than the friars or sisters in no way indicates a necessary 'watering down' of the values. Embracing authentic secularity requires concretising Franciscan values.

Franciscan spirituality is to en flesh Christ in our world, to make Jesus fully present. Why? Because we believe that Jesus is the Incarnation, the enfleshment of God in our world. Jesus is sent o us to show us how God relates to us, how God wants to relate to us. Because Jesus reveals God the Father, because Jesus is the model of the fully integrated human person, then we embrace Jesus' attitudes and behaviours, knowing that even as Jesus invites us into relationship with the Father, we are summoned to love others into relationship with the Father.

### Secularity

A concern for Secular Franciscans, and lay persons in general, has been to extricate ourselves from the model of religious life when explaining and living our spirituality. However, there has been resistance to the terms *secular* and *secularity* because the terms have been used indifferently and synonymously with secularism and secularisation. Secularism, is an anti-religious, anti-spiritual, false ideology, whereas secularisation is a social and cultural process by which non-religious beliefs, practices and institutions replace religious ones in certain spheres of life.

The Christian view of secularity, however, is distinctive and necessary. Secularity acknowledges, affirms the *meaningfulness* of this *world* and refuses to accept the false dichotomy between spiritual and temporal, religious and secular. The human person doesn't simply exist in this world waiting for the moment of death to be joined to God; therefore, "fleeing from this world." Rather, human destiny is both eschatological and incarnational, requiring that woman and man enflesh Gospel

### Theology of World Transformation

Another view of the laity is the position that emphasises that the world has been entrusted to the responsibility of the human person and the human person must engage in the redemption of the world. The lay person (Secular Franciscan) is committed to the world, animates it with Christ's spirit, affirms its intrinsic goodness, and is dedicated to developing and transforming it according to Gospel values.

Again, Francis' own life enfleshed two essential concepts in this viewpoint: (1) the intrinsic goodness of creation; and (2) the necessity for personal conversion as a basis for world transformation. In the *Canticle of the Sun* St Francis praises God's goodness 'through' Brother Sun, Sister Moon; 'through' Brother Wind and Air and Sister Water; 'through' Brother Fire and Sister Mother Earth. He acknowledges God's loving presence in creation.

Further, Francis' call and challenge to everyone to embrace the penitential life, in the true biblical sense of *metanoia*, of a turning toward Christ...was not a turning away from an evil world (flight from the world), but rather a turning toward an acknowledgement of, and acceptance of, the world as gift; gift that was to be cherished and revered. *Metanoia* was a turning toward the attitudes and values of Christ which revealed the world and all of creation as signs of God's love and loving presence. Penance, *metanoia*, was embracing the attitude of God's pervasive love for all of creation and enfleshing that love by concrete and practical service to God's beloved—the leper, the outcast. This loving action was not only a living out of the corporal works of mercy, but, even

more importantly, a challenge to the established values and structures of 13th Century society.

Secular Franciscans are reminded of this challenge and responsibility in articles 7, 14 and 15 of the Pauline Rule. They are challenged to conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls “conversion” [metanoia]. “Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.” (Rule, 7) However, personal conversion must be combined with the responsibility “to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.” (Rule, 14) In the past, the most common understanding of social action was that of doing corporal works of mercy on an individual basis. Little concern was evidenced for changing the structures of our society which produced injustice on a massive scale. This is no longer viable for Secular Franciscans. Article 15 of the Pauline Rule appeals to Secular Franciscans: “...individually and collectively be in the forefront of promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives (how one lives on a day-to-day basis) and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.” The very nature of some professions (attorneys, doctors, parents) require the commitment to change those social structures which are opposed to Christian values. This, then, is ministry [service]. Ministry cannot be limited only to church activities like Eucharistic Minister, lector, religious educator—as necessary, and valuable as these are. In the theology of world transformation, the Secular Franciscan becomes aware that one’s chosen profession, occupation, IS MINISTRY; is a means for proclaiming the Gospel. In the theology of world

transformation, the Secular Franciscan serves the world and transforms it through one’s occupation, prophetically challenging the world to turn away from the idolatry of technology and mechanisation and exploitation of the human person. This necessitates being imbued with the Gospel values, and so again the Rule [Article 15] exhorts to “careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel.” (Rule, 4)

### Spirituality

The *lineamenta* defines spirituality as “...life according to the Spirit,...possible and required of every Christian, in that he or she is called to the perfection of love, something strongly reposed by the Second Vatican Council when speaking of the universal vocation to sanctity in the Church: it is, therefore, quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love.” (*Lumen Gentium* 40; *lineamenta* 43)

Secular Franciscans voluntarily take upon themselves the commitment “to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and centre of his life with God and people.” (Rule, 4) Essentially our spirituality is our personal experience of God, of Jesus and the subsequent attempt, daily, to love in that relationship, to have that experience of God be the focal point of one’s beliefs and actions, to respond to God’s initiative and allow our very selves to be transformed even as we work to transform the world with Christ’s presence.