

***OFM INTERNATIONAL JPIC MEETING,
LA VERNA RETREAT CENTER, SOUTH AFRICA, 1-14 DECEMBER 2004***

***FRANCISCAN RESPONSE TO CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE
FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE***

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0. Greetings and Presentation of the paper

My very first duty and privilege at this meeting, I believe, is to greet and welcome all of you. And I would like to do so in the Franciscan manner of “Pax et Bonum! Pace e Bene! Peace and all good to all of you!”

It is with joy, gratitude and humility that I extend my personal warm welcome and also that of the Franciscan Province (OFM) and, indeed, of all the Franciscans in this part of the world.

We are all very glad to have you here, in South Africa, and particularly at this Franciscan Retreat Centre which, in many ways, is the home the entire Franciscan Family here in Southern Africa. It is here that many meetings that were significant in the establishment of our Franciscan Federation - which led to the present Province of the Order of Friars Minor -took place, in the early 1970s. It is also here that the various groups of the larger Franciscan Family meet every year, when they participate in the Franciscan Convention.

The present paper is not a scholarly treatise on the particular theme and discussion of this meeting. There are people who would deal better on that matter. Rather, this is a simple, opening reflection to this very important meeting. My hope and prayer is that this presentation will be an inspiration and support to all of you who are involved in the crucial work of animating, in various ways, the Franciscan vocation, especially in its very important and integral dimension of JPIC.

Therefore, the importance of this meeting cannot be overestimated. I would like to consider this gathering as very significant due to, first of all, its international character - here will be shared the rich and invaluable experiences from the various parts of the world. Another significance of this meeting lies in the fact that it is the very first International JPIC of its kind here in the continent of Africa, the continent that is known for its conflict situations, caused - as we all know - by a variety of factors that are both internal and external. And so, because of these factors, Africa deserves to be granted a chance of a reflection and, hopefully, some practical implementing of such a reflection that are so much part of our Franciscan charism.

My dear sisters and brothers, we Franciscans are women and men of the Church. Francis, as we know, was a true son of the Catholic Church. He was so loyal and also very dedicated in implementing the sound and practical teachings of the Church. It is in that spirit that we too gather here, to reflect and plan together what the good Lord wants of us and of all his beloved children in this continent of bondage, corruption, poverty, famine, diseases and all sorts of evils that threaten the image of God in each and every human being.

Let us bear in mind, as well, that the holy season of Advent invites us to “seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness...” (Mt. 6: 33). In this way we will truly be those who hunger and thirst for what is right...those who will be satisfied... those who are the peacemakers and so be blessed as sons and daughters of God (Mt. 5: 6, 9).

I propose to develop this paper along the the following plan, with these sections :

1. Introduction; 2. St. Francis of Assisi and Conflict situations; 3. African perspective; 4. The Church’s role;5. Franciscans in Africa; 6. Conclusion. A short bibliography is provided at the very end.

1. Introduction

The association of the Franciscans with South Africa goes back a few centuries. It is a known fact that when the European voyagers, especially the Portuguese and the Spanish, sailed along the coast of Africa, on their way to India where they were trading..., they passed the Cape of Good Hope. This was in the fifteenth and sixteenth century - Bartholomeu Diaz landed in Algoa Bay (Cape) in 1488, on his way to India; Vasco da Gama followed the same route in 1497; Manuel de Sousa is also mentioned by the historian Lord Bryant - who was a Trappist monk, in Mariannhill, South Africa, and is also a great historian - as another Portuguese sailor...1552. (*The Coming of the Franciscans...to South Africa...*page 20).

While the Europeans were sailing around the Africa coast – and were also involved in slave trade – they fortunately or unfortunately had Franciscan friars with them, as chaplains...At these points (Cape of Good Hope; Port of Natal) the celebration of the Holy Eucharist took place. In fact, my mother belongs to one of the few clans that are descendants of those sailors – *Amamolo*, who are also known as *Abelungu* (the Whites/Europeans) – and their only *isiko* (ritual) very much resembles the Holy Mass. Was their ancestor an ex-priest? Who was he? These are some of the questions that surround this man who is just known as “*Bhayi*” from “Bye-bye!”

So, then, the European sailors left their mark on the continent, and the Franciscans were part of this.

Again, when the European settlers came to South Africa – (17th -19th centuries) – they brought with them the Secular Franciscans so that when the friars came to the country later they were to assist them...The Capuchins came to the country in 1929 and they have concentrated mainly in Cape Town. In the past decade or so they have also moved to Kwazulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg) and very recently they have opened a Formation house in Pretoria, next to the OFMs.

The very first historically known (OFM) friar to come to the country was Daniel Burke. He came with the first bishop of South Africa (1838, Cape Town), Patrick Griffith, who was a Dominican – Daniel was the bishop’s secretary but died two years later.

The first group of the Order of Friars Minor came to our country in 1932. They were from the Bavarian Province, St. Anton, in Germany. They went to the diocese of Mariannhill near Durban, where the Provincial house is situated and where you will be spending at least one night (12th December). After three years (1935) those friars were sent to another place where they had to start a new Mission, the present diocese of Kokstad. In 1946, as the German friars met with difficulties – due to the Second World War – and so could not continue working and supplying personnel to the new Mission, the Irish Province came to their help. The Irish friars were, therefore, the second group in this country and they soon spread to other parts of the country, like the present day Gauteng Province (Pretoria – where they opened a new National Seminary, St. John Vianney, and also took over some parishes in the area of Johannesburg). The third group of friars were the English who went to what we call today the diocese of Dundee, in Kwazulu-Natal.

As part of the background to our Franciscan presence and ministry in South Africa we have to refer to the situation of the country, the Church and, therefore, the Order too. When the Franciscans came to this country it was a racially divided land – a country in which a person was identified and treated according to one’s colour of the skin. I trust that we have all heard about the question of apartheid. This evil system was formally introduced into the law of our country in 1948. I do not intend to go into a lecture on this matter here. However, it has to be noted that one cannot think of South Africa, one cannot talk about this country without referring to this historical phenomenon which has certainly left an indelible mark on the people. Thank God, apartheid was formally done away with in 1994 when for the very first time the peoples of this land voted for their own democratically elected government.

During the time of apartheid the Church tried its best to side with the poor and oppressed. The friars were also participating in various initiatives and projects in the fight against this evil system. In this regard, one has only to read Br. Patrick Noonan's book, with a quite attractive and interesting title *They are Burning the Churches* (2003).

Still more interesting for the participants at this meeting is the fact that most of the incidents narrated in that book took place in this very area of our land, the Vaal Triangle. It is also here that the Franciscan friars have been doing much work for the freeing of the peoples both spiritually and politically.

I was glad to be informed that you will be given a chance to visit some of the places that are part of the history that is so moving and inspiring and, once again, particularly in this section of South Africa.

2. St. Francis of Assisi and Conflict situations

As followers of St. Francis we have to take him as our model in his imitation of Christ. He was so radical in that imitation that he would want to do everything, whatever he had to be and do, just as Christ had done.

I think we will all agree that St. Francis was a man who was familiar with conflicts and these were in various forms and degrees. Included here are the following: clashing with his father; battles as a knight; disagreement with some of his followers (the Brothers); differences with Church authorities; the Church crusades.

I would also say that there is a close link between Francis's interior conflicts and the external ones. The spiritual, inner struggles were sometimes caused by the external forces. Again, his response to the exterior battles was very much according to his growth in his inner person, his spiritual maturity which his biographers describe as "becoming another Christ". (Celano, *Legenda Maior, Trium Sociorum, etc.*).

2.1. Conflicts in his country

In 1200 the citizens of Assisi were at war with each other: the *maiores* and the *minores* were clashing over "power" and *Rocca Maggiore*, symbol of power for the *maiores*, was destroyed. As a result of this revolution some of the noble families fled Assisi and were exiled in Perugia. Clare's family, too, went to spend a year in Perugia.

Assisi was at war with surrounding towns, especially Perugia which would be considered as the arch-enemy. Francis, like many young men of his place and age, was involved in these inter-cine battles. In fact, he was a prisoner of war when Assisi was defeated (1202-1203) and he became very sick after that experience. (*1 Cel. 3-4*).

Francis wanted to make a name for himself by being involved in these battles. When he heard of the glory won by Gualtier (Walter) de Brienne – commander of the papal army – he enrolled himself with him. While on his way to one of these battles, in Apulia, the Lord appeared to him in a vision (*1 Cel. 4-6*).

2.2. Conflicts with his family

His father – Peter Bernardone – was always a proud man who wanted to see his son succeeding, like himself, and making himself a great name. His strove hard for this: training his son (Francis) to take over his shop (merchant) and providing him with all the equipment necessary for going to battle with the other young men. He obtained for him a most beautiful horse. However, to his father's disgust, Francis was not a naturally violent person – this was not really his line and he won the wrath of his father by changing his attitude and his way of life, following his rather gentle, kind and humble manner, especially after his conversion. His father did all he

could to revenge himself on his son: imprisoning him in a cell in his house (*1Cel. 10ff*); taking him to the Church court. The climax of all this conflict with his father was when Francis stripped himself naked in front of the bishop of Assisi and the people gathered at the church square, exclaiming, “Up to now I have considered Peter Bernardone as my father...from now onward I will say: Our Father in heaven...!” He handed back his clothes and belongings to his father (*1 Cel. 13-15*).

Some Franciscan scholars want to believe that Francis, who was such a great reconciler and lover of peace, would have reconciled with his family, especially his father, at some later stage in his life.

2.3. Conflicts with his followers

Francis eventually became the founder of a huge spiritual family, the Franciscan Movement comprising three Orders – the First, Second and Third Orders.

He also had to confront his own followers, especially when some of the educated men coming to join him thought that he was only a dreamer and wanted to change his vision, exchanging his rather simple “Brotherhood” with a more formal, organized Order like the Benedictines. Francis emphasized his conviction that he had been called and shown his way of life by the Lord himself and no other person could tell him what to do...(*Testament par. 14*). Moreover, this way of life – the Gospel – was confirmed for him by the pope (*ibid, 15*).

Thomas of Celano shows how the Saint clashed with his followers on the question of owning property, and houses in particular. When Francis returned to Assisi one time he found a beautiful house where the brothers were living and he started to pull it down until he was stopped by some of the citizens who told him that it was not the brothers’ but the people’s house (being used by the friars). (*2 Cel., 57*). Again, Francis ordered sick brothers to evacuate a house in which they were living in Bologna. (*Ibid., 58*).

2.3. Difference with the Church

I do not think that we should go as far as some of the scholars in claiming that Francis of Assisi was such a great prophetic person that the Church suffocated him and changed his revolutionary spirit. One such a person would be the Protestant Franciscan Paul Sabatier.

We Franciscans know very well that Francis was loyal to the Church and he wanted his followers to do the same, to be true sons and daughters of the Catholic Church. At the same time, this does not take away the fact that Francis did differ with some of the Church officials and practices.

I think that we should always bear in mind that there will always be a tension between the institutional and the charismatic dimensions of the Church. This has always been there and it will always be the case. Moreover, this is good for the followers of Christ as long as it is handled in the right manner. Take, for example, the great personalities of the early Church: St. Peter and St. Paul. In Galatians Paul makes it very clear that he clashed with Peter – who was the representative of the institutional Church and the leader of the entire Church (the first pope); Paul is certainly a symbol of the charismatic dimension of the Church. Paul shows a very good balance, according to me, and a solution to this difficulty in his first letter to the Corinthians (chapters 12-13). First of all, there are various gifts (charisma) within the same Church, which is the Body of Christ and, all of them are important and must be used for the good of the entire Church.(ch. 12). Secondly, Christians must, like Jesus Himself, strive for the greatest and most important gifts: faith, hope and love. Yes, all the other gifts should be imbued with the spirit of love-charity so much so that if one does not have this (charity) one might as well forget he has anything at all.

In Francis of Assisi – who in many ways, according to me, resembles St. Paul the apostle – the above point was so true. That is, while he differed and indeed clashed with some of the Church's hierarchy he nevertheless continued to maintain his spirit of loyalty to the Church which he considered as the only true representative of Christ here on earth.

According to Rosalind Brooke Cardinal Hugolin wanted to use Francis and his followers even to the extent of advancing the political cause of the Church, while Francis, on the other hand, wanted to be a simple, itinerant preacher of the Gospel who through his poor, simple life would bear witness to the Gospel. And that was his original ideal for all his followers. However, that is another long story – the division of the Franciscan Movement – which is not for us in this brief discussion. Another fundamental principle in which Francis differed very much with the mentality of the Church and society of his time is that of the crusades. The Church used weapons and fought against the Moslems in the holy places. Francis, on the other hand, went to them without anything but the message of the Gospel: of peace and reconciliation – we are all brothers and sisters, children of the same God who is Father of all people whatever faith we profess. (*1 Cel. 57; 2 Cel. 30*).

2.4. Some concluding remarks

From the above sub-sections we can clearly see that Francis had a very different way of approaching and solving conflict situations, i.e. different from the Church and people of his day and age. Since after his conversion, especially in 1208 when he listened to the Gospel being read during the Holy Mass, at the Portiuncula on the 24th of February – the Gospel text in which Christ sends out his disciples in pairs, to go and preach his kingdom of peace... – Francis did all he could to imitate Jesus in everything.

He taught his followers to greet the people by saying, “May the Lord give you his peace!”, as Christ had...in that same gospel.

In that same spirit of peace, gentleness, humility, love he faced situations of conflict and this is particularly expressed in the famous *Canticle of Creatures* that he produced in 1225. In this poetic praise of God for all his creatures, including Sister Death, he embraces all creatures as his brothers and sisters. This is a true celebration of universal brotherhood!

This strikes us especially when considering the fact that he produced this song in a not so comfortable situation. He was very sick, his sight was very poor as he suffered from eye disease and so could not see even the light that he thanks God for; he was in great pain.

Again, he was troubled by the mice in the little room where the Poor Ladies (Clare and the Sisters) were taking care of him.

Finally, on this point, Francis heard of the battle between the bishop and the mayor of Assisi. He quickly added another strophe to his canticle and asked the brothers to rush to sing for the two leading figures of the city that masterpiece by way of persuading them to reconcile.

It might be a paradox that the followers of the Saint, who themselves have experienced divisions in their understand of the ideals of the Founder, yet have been considered as models peace and reconciliation both within the Church and society. They have always been seen to be close to the poor and oppressed of this world, just as their Father was.

Although the Second Order was enclosed they were praying for the peace and reconciliation of the world. After all, both Francis and Clare very much knew the evil of war and violence and so they could not forget to place that situation in the presence of the all- powerful and merciful Lord. Clare is known for her powerful spirit of reconciliation. (Read Marco Bartoli). She miraculously warded off an invasion of the monastery by the barbarians...and she did this through the Blessed Eucharist, the source of all her powers.

The Third Order was meant to be a means of implementing the ideals of Saint, the spirit of the Gospel, in that world of conflict and hatred which he himself promoted as a young knight. He promoted peace and universal brotherhood through their way of life, especially as they were not allowed to carry weapons. This surely had a great impact on the society which was even noticeable with the complaint of the civil authorities as they were short of young men to fight for their cities. The Church prelates – who had much powers in those days – defended the rights of these Franciscans and so peace was restored to many towns and cities. The Secular Franciscans were seen by the Church, especially Leo XIII, as great instruments of peace in the world.

It is along these considerations, I believe, that the Franciscans should involve themselves in conflict situations and no matter where that is.

3. African perspective

Africans are just like other peoples of the world, in the sense that while, on the one hand, they are naturally religious, peaceful, joyful and loving, on the other hand – again, like any other people of the world – they can be very cruel and are capable of committing the most evil, violent crimes.

African peoples, again, do have their ways of going about reconciliation and healing of conflict situations.

3. 1. Call of Africa

One of the most beautiful and appealing statements produced by the Franciscan Order, for me, is that one which was an invitation to the various Entities of the Order to come out and assist in the reinforcement of the Order's presence in Africa. This was issued by the Minister General, John Vaughn, together with other leaders of the Order, in 1982 when the "Africa Project" was formally formed and is entitled: *The Call of Africa* . It reads as follows:

"Up to now St. Francis and his life have been known in terms of the culture of the west, especially that of Assisi and Italy. We are convinced that the African experience has much to teach us in the cherished values of prayer, simplicity, humility, minority, poverty, joy, peace, love and brotherhood, in our understanding of St. Francis and Franciscan life".

The Congresses of Franciscan Formation that took place in Nairobi (1995) and Lusaka (1998) both confirm this truth in their efforts and attempt at enculturation of African values, especially in the area of Formation.

3.2. Response to conflict, reconciliation and healing in African society

A brief and simple general look at some of the areas in which reconciliation and healing take place in African societies.

- a) Family:
 - ancestors consulted and appeased
 - mediators and intermediaries: ancestors; elders; traditional healers
 - rituals performed to bring about reconciliation and healing
 - mourning the dead, therefore, funerals quite an occasion, and, unfortunately sometimes easily exploited/abused by business people!
- b) Clan:
 - same process as above
 - elders would be leaders of clan.
- c) Tribe/nation:
 - Settlers (Whites) and colonists: came and took over, with their sophisticated and superior armaments robbed the indigenous people of their property/land;
 - forced indigenous people to their subordinates and even slaves.

In South Africa, for example, in the 18th and 19th centuries the African people clashed with the settlers who were taking away their land. The South African history – written by the oppressors – tried to convince the people that the Whites found no peoples in the country when they arrived here, that they were the first ones to be in the land. Jan Van Riebeeck, leader of the Dutch East India Company, who landed and settled in the Cape of Good Hope in 1652, was for a very long time taken as the point of reference in the whole history of South Africa. The Churches report, however, made it clear that thousands of years before the arrival of the Whites there were people of African descent in this part of the world – who were agriculturalists and pastoralists...

- 1882 - Formation of Imbumba yama-Afrika
- 1910 - Union of South Africa (Blacks excluded)
- 1912 - African National Congress formed – Church ministers leading, in a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation
- 1913 - Land Act: 87% of land for the White minority; 13% for Black majority
- 1948 - Apartheid made formal
- 1958 - PAC
- 1961 - Sharpsville massacre: 169 killed in a peaceful demonstration and rejection of pass laws
- 1961- Formation of Umkhonto weSizwe/Spear of the nation
- 1963 - Rivonia Treason Trial; Robben Island
- 1970s - Black Consciousness Movement; more imprisonment; exile
- 1976 - SOWETO uprising
- 1980 - Zimbabwe independence; more oppressive, violent laws and practices by the State
- 1990 - Namibian Independence
 - 11 February: Mandela released.
 - Talk about Talks - CODESA
- 1993- Killing of Chris Hani; call for calm!
- 1994 - First Democratic elections.
 - TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMMITTEE!!!

4. The Church's teaching role

In April of this year I participated in a celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Rwanda massacre (1994-2004) which was organized by the Evangelization and Mission department of the Order of Friars Minor in Rome. One of the speakers, quite a prominent person, shared with us how he differs with the “theory of a just war” which – as we know— is part of the Church's teaching.

4.1. Theory of a just war

Part of the just war theory are the principles to be followed as strictly as possible. Indeed, it has to be very exceptional cases – certainly to be the lesser of two evils.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church treats with this under the section of the fifth commandment. The equilibrium of the Church's teaching on this question is struck by, on the one hand, her insistence on the necessity of working for peace and also on the obligation of all to preserve life (not to kill) and, on the other hand, the Church pointing out that “as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defence, once all peace efforts have failed.”(*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2308).

In the next section the Catechism provides the elements of a just war theory:

- a) The strict conditions for legitimate defence by military force require rigorous consideration
- b) The damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain;
- c) all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective;

- d) the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated. The power of modern means of destruction weighs very heavily in evaluating this condition. (*Ibid.* 2309).

4.2. Bishops and their teaching on Justice and Peace

In opening his foreword to a collection of documents of the Catholic Church's social teaching, Cardinal Basil Hume quotes the 1971 Synod of Bishops which stated, "The Church has the right, indeed the duty, to proclaim justice on the social, national and international level, and to denounce instances of injustice, when the fundamental rights of people and their very salvation demand it" (Proclaiming Justice and Peace, foreword).

One of the Synod's powerful statements on this question, according to me, is: Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation" (*Justice in the World, in Vatican Collection Vol. 2, page 696*).

What about South Africa - SACBC?

Since 1952 the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference issued statements against the evil of apartheid. However, it is particularly two statements that I would like to refer to. Those are the 1957 and the 1966 statements.

In the 1957 statement the bishops condemn apartheid as evil, and they call for the dismantling of this evil behaviour and system. While they direct themselves to both sides of the society – the Whites and the Blacks – it is more striking when they refer to the existence of this system even within the institutions of the Catholic Church. The bishops make it clear that such a stance is hypocritical and must be addressed practically and with immediate effect.

In the 1966 statement the Bishops wanted to implement the teachings of Vatican II to the South African situation. Among other things was to reiterate the vigorous condemnation of the Vatican Council: *Discrimination is to be eradicated as contrary to God's intent. (Pastoral Letter on Vatican II's teaching on Discrimination, July 1966, in South African Catholic Bishops' Conference)*.

5. Franciscans in Africa

What, then, is the Franciscans' role in situations of conflict, especially in Africa? That is the question and the theme of our present study.

The Franciscans' role in such a situation is to live and work according to their vocation and charism. And the way of doing that, I maintain, should flow from a reflection on the elements that have been outlined in the above sections of the present discussion-paper. To these we must also add the points that follow in the next sub-section.

5.1. Friars in Morocco and North Africa (COMONA)

The very first Franciscans to come to Africa were the first Missionaries who were sent by the Founder himself. Having arrived in Morocco in 1219, they became the very first martyrs of the Order in 1220 (killed by the Moslems due to their insistence on believing in the Gospel).

Today Morocco belongs to the COMONA Conference of the Order, i.e. north Africa and the Middle East. This Conference includes Egypt, the Holy Land and Libya. The ministry of the friars in this part of Africa is mainly a quite, simple presence, without proclaiming loudly and by word of mouth the Gospel message. As there are groups of Christians in this area, friars also need to give them moral and spiritual support.

One of the challenges in such a situation is to persevere and witness by means of example rather than by preaching...

Here we cannot fail to think of Francis's Rule of 1221, especially the sixteenth chapter: Those Going Among the Saracens and other Non-believers).

There are a few points we need to underline here. First of all, Francis, as always, refers to the Gospel so that his words are not just his but those of the Lord Himself, as he clearly states this in some of his letters to various groups: his own Brothers; to the Faithful; to the Clergy, and so on. So, then, he quotes the Gospel so that he can base his teachings on those of our Lord Jesus Christ. Again, this Gospel text – ...I am sending you like sheep...be prudent as serpents...simple as doves – is to be a reminder to those that are being sent...to go among those to whom they are sent, in the spirit of this text. Like sheep..? This goes along with what is said at a later stage in the same passage of the Rule, that is: to be humble to every human creature...

Secondly, the Missionaries must go only with the inspiration of the Lord. We are sent and so should always remember that we did not choose our vocation and ministry on our own. If that is the case, then we will be humble and grateful to the Lord...

Thirdly, there are two ways of living among non-believers. "One way is not to engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God's sake and to acknowledge that they are Christians. The other way is to announce the Word of God, when they see it pleases the Lord...that non-believers may believe in almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit..." (*Earlier Rule, ch. 16*)

Francis wrote this Rule only after he had been to the Saracens himself (1220) and also after he had sent his first followers to Morocco. So, then, there was already a development in his teaching on Missionary involvement.

While these principles are directed mainly to Missionaries among the Saracens, they also very much apply to whatever situation we find ourselves in; we are to strive to have that spirit and attitude of St. Francis as expressed in this part of the Rule.

Today the Order calls for dialogue with the various Religions and cultures and this challenge is very much relevant to those who find themselves in this part of the continent (*Minister General's Report, Chapter 2003, par. 7*).

Dialogue is seen by the General Chapter, in the final document, as one of the five responses of the Franciscans to the current challenges of the contemporary world. It is "the path to peace" (*May the Lord Give You Peace, 2003, par. 28*). The document points to three dimensions of dialogue and they are:

- a) Conversion - the experience of St. Francis to which he refers at the beginning of his Testament: "The Lord gave me, brother Francis, to begin the life of penance in this manner..."
- b) Purification - dialogue requires a pause...a reflection.
- c) Obedience to the word of God - that word which challenges us so that we can grow...

4.2. Sub-Saharan Africa

This is the second area in which the Franciscan friars have another Conference (Africa Sub-Saharan Conference). This Conference has nine Entities: South Africa; East Africa (Nairobi); DRC; West Africa; Mozambique; Zimbabwe; Angola; Congo-Brazzaville; Guinea-Bissau.

Again, the friars here are involved in a variety of ministries and apostolates. A very important ministry that needs to be emphasized in this part of Africa, I believe, is that of healing and reconciliation. That is so because the various evils that inflict our people here – displacement;

wars; poverty; diseases; famine, and so on – leave deep and bleeding wounds. Such people are often thirsty for violence, revenge; their hearts are full of hatred and all sorts of unhealthy attitude which only the spirit of the Gospel can heal.

It is important also to realize that the evils that plague these people are very often linked to each other. That is, poverty leads to famine; that also leads to diseases and corruption and to fighting, and so on. Therefore, we are to seek root-causes and even more so we should help people to find out the root-causes themselves so that they would be in a better position to address them.

A fundamental question that needs to be addressed particularly in this part of Africa is that of enculturation. First of all, I would say that this is due to the fact that Christianity is fairly new in this area. Africa sub-Saharan was evangelized – generally – only in the last two centuries; some of the churches have just celebrated their first hundred years of existence. The danger, then, would be that believers might be living in two worlds: that of the Church (Christian) and that of their own environment, without any impact of the Gospel. In other words, people would have split personalities.

Obviously, that kind of life would lead to violence – first an interior one and then an external, physical one...

With the promotion of enculturation Christians would make the faith their own and allow the Gospel values to influence their lives in a deeper and meaningful manner. In this regard, Aiyward Shorter challenges a question that he claims was sometimes asked by those who do not seem to fully understand the motives of the Rwanda massacre in 1994. He says that some people ask: How could such a people who were mostly Catholics come to the point of destroying one another in such a way...? Shorter, then, goes on to point out the other side of the coin. And that is: perhaps one could also say that Christianity had not really been well planted in those people... In South Africa, the apartheid regime continually claimed to be a Christian government. Yet, it produced and upheld a most evil system in the world.

Establishment of international fraternities would be an effective testimony to the Franciscan way of life. In this way we are counter-acting ethnicity which threatens our Franciscan charism. International fraternities also underline the universality of our brotherhood – all are God's children whatever race, colour, language, ethnic group they may belong to.

5. Conclusion

By way of concluding this reflection I would like that we look back with gratefulness for what has been achieved and we also face the future challenges with courage.

What has been achieved? What should we be grateful for as Franciscans in this part of the world?

In South Africa – and I would think this applies to other parts of the African continents as well – the Franciscans (OFM) opened up a home for their candidates. Unlike the apartheid government, that alienated people from their home-country and even estranged family-members from each other – through the apartheid laws and practices – the Franciscans, on the other hand, made their members feel at home. There are three areas in which I would suggest this was done. Firstly, through the establishment of one, united Entity – the Federation (1970s); Vicariate (1983); Vice-Province (1985) and, finally, the Province (1999). Home-community-family are basic elements in Africa.

Secondly, the local friars were allowed to keep their home-names at Solemn Profession. Again, there is a great significance in African names...

Thirdly, friars could choose to make their Solemn Profession in their own home-places. I really believe that this is an important contribution toward forming good and healthy values. It is part

of healing that is needed in our African people and helps in reducing whatever form of conflict would be in our people.

Another point that is connected with the above one is that of fraternity. Fraternity is considered as the primary means of evangelization. Sarpong holds that the family model of the Church is most appropriate in Africa. This is the contribution of the African people to the universal Church. Fraternity-family-community is certainly one of the values where Franciscan and African spiritualities meet. We should do our best in promoting this common element of our life.

At the universal level, the Franciscans should be proud of being NGO members at the United Nations Organization. Much of the work of our brothers and sisters that are involved in this project have an effective contribution in creating a better world for those who are who are deprived of the basic necessities of life, I believe, and a major part of these are to be found in our continent.

Challenges are and will always be there. I think that we should see them as opportunities for growing. Here in Africa, one of the challenges for us Franciscans is the whole area of relationships between us Christians and Moslems. Dialogue is very much promoted by the Order today. I believe that our Capuchin brothers are taking this seriously. Should we all follow suit as sons and daughters of St. Francis?

Again, the OFM General Chapter has a few proposals, in this area of JPIC, that need to be considered and implemented. They challenge us in our way of life, especially in caring for creation. Are we ready to put these into practice?

I would like to close this section and the whole of our reflection by referring to the season of Advent. Isaiah's vision of peace, joy and fulfilment at the coming of the Messiah needs to be kept alive. In the first reading of the first Sunday of Advent, we read of those days when all the nations would all go together to the house of the Lord, worshipping Him in the same temple in Jerusalem and also respecting each other, loving one another, seeking to solve problems not through violence and war...but by dialogue and respect...(Is. 2: 1-5). In the first reading of the second Sunday of Advent – next Sunday – we read: the wolf and the bear lie down together...(Is. 11: 1-10). We, Franciscans are the very ones to promote that kingdom of the Messiah.

As we know so well, it is not an easy task. It has cost some of us their very lives. Remember the martyrs of the Rwanda massacre: at least one Missionary friar (Ivan from Croatia) and was killed because of his involvement in assisting the homeless, refugees of the war... and George, a local boy who was killed just before his Solemn Profession. Like Francis of Assisi we too are called to be prophetic in working for that kingdom of Jesus: a kingdom of peace, justice, joy and true love – where all are to be considered as sons and daughters of the one and the same Father in heaven, God Himself, the Creator of all peoples of every race, language and nation. Then, we can look upon all of God's creatures as our brothers and sisters.

Finally, this reminds us of our obligation to be men and women of prayer. This is the very first priority of the Franciscans. Unless we prayer and do things in that spirit of prayer and devotion, we will be tempted to do things just like any other men or women, our efforts in bringing about God's kingdom will be only social projects which any person can do.

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