

Towards a Spirituality of JPIC Animation.

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Introduction

The Church has proclaimed the importance of Christian commitment to the transformation of the world to the likeness of the Lord (Cf. Centesimus Annus, 5). Our General Constitutions and documents are filled with references to the fact that JPIC is an integral part of our life and mission (Cf. GG.CC. 1: 2; 97: 1; R.F.F. 25).

The JPIC animator helps create awareness of the suffering and injustices in the world, by being himself sensitive and aware of the effects of intolerance and greed on the most vulnerable, as well as encouraging gospel initiatives to alleviate pain and tackle the underlying causes of exclusion. He cannot achieve this alone. As well as fraternal and institutional support, he needs a strong and developing spirituality. I would like to highlight eight aspects towards such a spirituality.

1. Animator

The principal responsibility of a JPIC coordinator (commission) is to encourage friars to become involved with Justice and Peace issues and not just do the work themselves. The activist does what

needs to be done. The animator must convince friars; by word, deed and ideas that JPIC is an integral part of our Franciscan vocation and not an optional extra. Every friar is responsible for the personal and fraternal living out of the JPIC values. It is not the exclusive responsibility of those who happen to be named.

There is a danger of placing labels on people: he is in youth ministry, social ministry, family ministry etc. We need to distribute responsibilities, but at the same time, be aware of the dangers of confining the work to those named. It is regularly stated: “every friar is responsible for vocations!” We believe the theory, but in practice everything is left to the friar appointed. When he is successful everyone is responsible, but when he fails, he is alone.

If the JPIC commission ignores its animation role, JPIC in the life and ministries of the Order will not develop well. A JPIC animator must ask at least three questions:

- What am I doing/proposing to encourage the inclusion of JPIC values, projects etc., into the daily life of the fraternity and their pastoral work?
- How can I support friars with a particular JPIC ministry
- What other issues does the commission need to address, which the Province/local fraternity is unwilling or unable to assume just yet?

The General Definitory agrees that JPIC is an integral and constitutive part of the

Franciscan charism. JPIC animation requires that we first open ourselves and our fraternities to the excluded of the world, listen attentively to the cry of the poor and be moved by the face of the crucified, poor and humble Jesus in today's leper. If JPIC animation is understood as first solving inequalities and injustices within fraternities and then looking outward, it is a grossly mistaken notion. How can we compare injustices experienced by the vast majority of humanity to those, however alarming, within our fraternities? If we succeed in being touched by the suffering of the excluded, our structures, ministries and to whom we minister will also be called into question.

2. Love of Jesus

What sustains a JPIC animator in his commitment? Personally the focus narrows down to love of Jesus and love of the poor; symbolized in a photo in the JPIC Rome office of a little barefoot refugee boy walking with a sack on his back, containing all his earthly possessions, with a caption: "He got in the way of somebody's war". The JPIC animator is to serve Jesus in the most vulnerable and excluded of our world by animating the brothers to live JPIC values and include them in their ministries.

The JPIC animator must cultivate a strong relationship with Jesus. Unless he possesses a solid, balanced and consistent prayer life, he will eventually burn out, become disillusioned, resentful and

/or lose the Franciscan perspective. JPIC animators are not social workers. When a JPIC animator leaves the Order it has institutional consequences, delaying the process for JPIC to be assumed as a constitutive part of our Franciscan vocation. Young brothers, enthusiastic about the social dimension of the gospel, passionate about the struggle for a better world, are a delight and a source of worry to me. Delight, because it is a positive sign for the future of the Order and worry because it implies commitment involving risk and misunderstanding, which leads many to opt for other ways of serving the poor and the disadvantaged of our world outside the Order.

3. Love of the Brothers

The best animator is not necessarily the most capable or technically prepared, but one who loves the brothers, despite their resistance and lack of response to JPIC values. Weakness can lead a brother to ask for support and show real appreciation on receiving it. This is the basis of collaborative ministry. The animator who loves the brothers will be looking for ways to encourage, coax and urge them towards a deeper involvement with the excluded. Brothers will not be bullied, forced or shamed into action. Every brother in every apostolate and at every stage of his life is doing something related to JPIC, even though it may not have the label. A respectful animator recognizes these aspects and builds on them. Animation is a labor of love.

4. Love of the poor and excluded

Helder Camera, recently deceased, underlines a vital quality for a JPIC animator. He said: “When I give bread to the hungry they call me a saint, but when I ask why the poor have no bread they call me a subversive.” Love of the poor is central to JPIC animation work. It is not an exclusive love, but one that channels most energies, resources, efforts and projects for and with the poor in their struggles for life and dignity. As well as supporting emergency humanitarian needs, the animator must encourage reflection, whereby questions relating to unjust structures are addressed.

5. Collaborative Spirit

A real collaborative spirit has to be worked on. There seems to be a dichotomy between the language and reality of collaboration at many levels of the Order. How can we recognize an individualist from someone with a collaborative nature?

A brother who has a collaborative spirit: *Constantly consults others; Plans with others; Recognizes the importance of working with others; Delegates responsibility; Evaluates the work regularly; Understands leadership in terms of service and not from the perspective of power and prestige; Empowers others to assume responsibility; Happy when someone succeeds at a task and is even happier when the job is done more satisfactorily by others; Constantly encourages others in their work and acknowledges their efforts; Supports others in*

times of failure; Flexible in implementing agreed upon processes; Values involvement more than success in the work; Believes in the dignity, capacity and equality of others; Patient in the face of obstacles.

6. Lifestyle

An animator who struggles to personally live the JPIC dimension of his vocation will have a greater chance of acceptance by brothers and his discourse taken seriously.

Love of the poor, closeness to them, support of their organizations and their causes, as well as a genuine effort to live simply, is essential for a JPIC animator. Everyone entrusted with JPIC animation must evaluate his or her own lifestyle. It is helpful to do the evaluation in a constructively critical and fraternal atmosphere. Blatant contradictions need to be rectified, or at least worked at. A sincere effort cannot be faulted. Nobody expects perfection, but few brothers will easily forgive unattended contradictions. Where we live, what we possess, who we associate with, on what we spend our money, who our friends are, point to a deeper reality within. How we react to provocation and contradiction is a pointer to our inner peace and non-violent approach. Do we participate fully in fraternal life? Do we assume our share of responsibilities? Is our zeal for the far away poor, sick and excluded matched by our compassion for the sick, elderly brothers, as well as “difficult” brothers.

What do we do to show we really reverence creation?

7. Networking

Many brothers do excellent pastoral work. Their hard work often leads to exhaustion and stress. The importance of networking is not widely appreciated. Many JPIC coordinators miss valuable opportunities, both nationally and internationally, to connect with other people and groups working on similar issues. They fail to appreciate the importance of international solidarity and networking for the benefit of the excluded.

A regular complaint about religious members of bigger congregations is their self-sufficient attitude and inability to network. They fail to support inter-religious groups, NGOs and other people involved in similar struggles. A lot of repetitive work is done; where a better and more intelligent use of resources would be more effective.

Decisions affecting people are mostly taken at other levels outside of their control. National and International decisions will eventually affect the poor we serve. We must try to influence these decisions in the light of the gospel and the social teaching of the Church. This is the underlying reason for our presence at the United Nations, through Franciscans International and the Washington office for Latin America: a service for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.

The JP commission of the Episcopal conference in South Africa has four full time professionals working on policy documents related to economic and social policies. Their contributions are so valuable that the national government invites their contribution to legislative policy papers. This work is truly an integral part of evangelization. It is imperative we try to constructively influence our Government's policies before negatively affecting the poor we serve.

8. Ongoing Formation

Most JPIC coordinators have no formal training. Many are passionate about issues affecting the poor, have practical experiences, but lack knowledge and technique. Our theological and philosophical training often does not equip us to deal with or understand some complex mechanisms affecting people and the environment.

A good missionary learns from experience. JPIC animators are in a similar situation: limited experience, some knowledge and enormous challenges. The JPIC Resource-book was compiled to help animators, but is not a panacea. The JPIC animator needs to keep abreast of current affairs, listen to critical analysis of events and apply gospel principles. Courses should be undertaken in economics, the social doctrine of the church, Law, Ecology and Human Rights, etc. Most JPIC animators have many other responsibilities. Long-term courses are often not realistic.

Conclusion

Encouraging progress is being made in the animation of JPIC values in the Provinces and Conferences of the Order, with countless excellent initiatives taking place. It has been stated, and it is an unfortunate reality, that the Church's Social Teaching is her best-kept secret. The JPIC animator should not expect this work to be readily appreciated or understood, even if there are endless gospel justifications, as well as arguments from our Franciscan sources which point to the importance of JPIC values. The JPIC animator needs to be personally convinced that the work of the incorporation of JPIC values into the life and ministries of the

brothers is indispensable for building up God's Kingdom and without which the Good News has no relevance. The animator helps sow the seeds of the Kingdom and the Lord brings results in His own good time. Defeatist attitudes have no part in the profile of a good JPIC animator. When some animation strategy is unsuccessful or meets with resistance a good evaluation is needed, with a desire to return to formulate new proposals. The animator searches for solutions and is not crushed or disappointed by the enormity of the challenges. When we recognize ourselves as God's instruments and that we only partially contribute to the solution we become freer to act.