

JPIC and Formation

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in Initial and On-going Formation

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I greatly thank Fr. Peter and Fr. Francis for having invited me to participate, although only for a few hours, in this International Congress of Animators of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the whole Order. My presence here wishes to be a sign of collaboration between the General Secretariat for Formation and Studies and the Office of Justice and Peace in Rome. It wishes to be, above all, the expression of a deep conviction that I have had for some time. Formation cannot go without this constitutive aspect of the Franciscan charism –Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) – nor can this essential aspect of our form of life enter into the concrete life of the friars apart from formation. Collaboration is not only convenient, it is necessary.

Because of time I do not intend to give a complete exposition of the topic. I would just like to point out some ideas to help reflection. During the dialogue that will follow my presentation, other interesting questions, can be clarified.

1. The Concept of Formation

We cannot speak of the place that JPIC should occupy in initial and on-going formation without, beforehand, clarifying the concept of formation. It would be to build on sand, with the danger that the castle would collapse when the first rains came. What, then, is formation?

Formation is not simply the learning of that which is considered “objective and acquired values” of the religious and Franciscan life. “Learning” does not necessarily “touch” the person; it does not necessarily get to his heart, to his deepest interior. Formation is not a simple response to the needs of the person in formation. This type of “formation,” because it does not challenge the person to place himself before a ‘you’ that invites him to be faithful to himself (or, at the same time, “pushes” him to overcome himself, to present himself higher objectives), does not permit him to grow as a person. Formation is an active collaboration with the action of God the Father, who, through the Holy Spirit, shapes the features of the only begotten Son in the heart of those being formed (be they in initial or on-going formation), in such a way that, through a slow and personal journey/process those being formed come to a “gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father” (VC 64), and thus, “all friars and candidates may follow Christ continuously in the world of today, in accordance with the form of life and Rule of St. Francis” (GGCC 126).

The ultimate objective of Franciscan formation is, therefore, the “following of Christ” in the present-day world according to the form of life of St. Francis. But the following of Christ does not consist of simply doing some things and not doing others. To follow Christ requires you to identify with Him, “assimilate his very attitudes,” to make His way of thinking and acting your own. And, given that we are, or wish to be, Friars Minor, this assimilation must be done by keeping in mind the way Francis did it.

2. The Attitudes of Jesus

In the New Testament there are two texts that, without being the only ones, can be considered, however, as basic at the time of expressing the attitudes of Jesus. The first text is from the Fourth Gospel. The Evangelist, having stated, “the Word became flesh” (Jn 1,14) forthrightly states “the only Son” is constantly oriented towards the bosom of the Father (Jn 1,18). The other text is that well-known part of Luke that puts those programmatical words into the mouth of Jesus: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives, sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord” (Lk 4,18-19).

Jesus is a man completely given over to the Father (oriented towards the bosom of the Father) and, consequently, totally to others, especially to those whose “cries for help” reach the presence of God the

Liberator (cf. Ex 3,7-10), of the little and last people, identifying himself fully with them (cf. Mt 25,40).

Remembering that already said, we can state that to form, or to be formed, means beginning a process – formation never ends (cf. PDC 70; VC 69) – that leads all friars and candidates to open up constantly to God and to man. For the believer, and greater still for the friar minor who through profession accepted to “follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ more closely and to observe the Gospel faithfully” (GGCC 5,2), there is an essential connection between the experience that affirms and confesses God and the experience of committing oneself to being in favor of others. Just like Jesus, his disciples also have to live their existence in the world as a radical gift to God for the salvation and liberation of others.

3. According to the Life and Rule of St. Francis

For the Friar Minor Francis –his life and Rule- is an obligatory mediation in order to live his radical donation to God and his commitment to the salvation and liberation of others. Among other elements, in this context, it is possible to cite the following characteristic elements of Francis’s form of life:

His “passion” for Jesus Christ. This passion leads the son of Pedro Bernardone to identify himself totally with Him, maintaining some deep relationships with God-Creator and Christ-Crucified.

His option for fraternity. This option leads Francis to receive all as brothers and “gifts” from the Lord (cf. Test 14).

His option for “lady poverty”. The “Poverello” expressed this option through his identification with the poor Christ and his profound “solidarity/compassion” with the poor, the marginalized, the excluded from society and especially the lepers. He expressed it through his living of minority that brought him to move from the “center” to the periphery, to insertion among the poor.

Francis, in a world divided between “greater” and “lesser”, opted for fraternity, minority and poverty. In a world and a Church dominated by the thirst for power, Francis opted for a style of life that would reflect the lack of power of the Gospel. In a society where there is confrontation between civil and ecclesiastical power, between Christians and Muslims, the “herald of the great King” opted for preaching and building reconciliation and peace. And all was because of his “passion” for the poor and Crucified Jesus Christ.

This is the form of life taken on by the Friar Minor at his profession. This is the form of life in which we must be formed and form others.

4. Principles of Franciscan Formation

In this context some of the principles of Franciscan Formation pointed out by the

Ratio Formationis of the Order take on a special relevance, such as:

“Franciscan Formation is experiential, that is... it encourages the concrete experience of the particular Franciscan style and values in the daily life of the fraternity and of the individual” (Ratio 47).

“Franciscan Formation is practical, inasmuch as it aims at transforming into action whatever is learned, especially by means of a constant habit of poverty and work...” (Ratio 48).

“Franciscan Formation is inculturated in the conditions of the life, environment and time in which it is carried out, while remaining faithful to the Gospel and to the traditions of the Order (cf. GGCC 130)” (Ratio 49).

“Franciscan Formation is open to new forms of life and service, since it is continually attentive to the present appeals of the world and the Church” (Ratio 50).

It is clear that these principles have much to do with JPIC. Taken seriously, they will assure a relevant place for JPIC in the whole formation process. If left to one side, the JPIC will be laid to one side both in initial and on-going formation.

5. A look at the Situation of Formation at the Present Moment

A long road has been traveled in the efforts to adapt formation to the requirements of the times in which we live and to the principles of Franciscan forma-

tion indicated by the GGCC and the Ratio. A long way more, however, has to be traveled, especially in order to make formation “holistic, that is to say, to take into account the whole person, in order that he may develop “harmoniously his physical, mental, moral and intellectual gifts and may integrate himself positively in social and community life” (Ratio 45). Much still remains to achieve a Franciscan formation that is “a journey during which the fundamental aspects of our consecrated life are cultivated,” among which the JPIC is certainly found (Ratio 46).

5.1. Achievements in Initial and On-going Formation in the Area of JPIC

In **on-going formation** we can point out the following achievements in the area of JPIC:

There already exist a considerable number of small fraternities inserted in poor areas. The experiences are constantly increasing of sharing time and vital spaces with the less fortunate, opening our very houses to the marginalized and excluded: refugees, Aids sufferers, drug-addicts, alcoholics...

Many are the friars who live a simple life close to the simple people. Despite our “sins” against poverty we continue to be “the friars of the people”.

The greater part of the Brothers live from the fruits of their work and the housework is generally done by them, without distinction of clerical or lay brothers.

More time is being given to reflection on JPIC topics in the programs of on-going formation.

There are many friars who take part in activities of JPIC both within their own organizations and in other Christian and non-Christian groups.

With regard to **initial formation** we can also show some successes. Among them we could underline the following:

The houses of initial formation inserted in poor area, with a poor life, are increasing. The formative experiences in poor environments are increasing, especially in the year of formation that is specifically Franciscan.

There are friars in initial formation that participate actively in the tasks of the provincial commission for JPIC.

There are Entities that prepare the friars in initial formation in all that relates to JPIC through courses or seminars.

5.2. Gaps in the On-going and Initial Formation in the Field of JPIC

Despite the achievements pointed out, we cannot avoid pointing out the gaps that are still easily found. Among others there are two that effect both the ongoing and the initial formation.

Our formation, which we receive and give, continues to be very “theoretical” and “academic,” in the sense that often it is programmed and conceived as simple “learning,” as if its final end was to accumulate knowledge and concepts. Such a formation is not “practical” in the sense pointed out earlier. Francis is a “practi-

cal” man. That which he hears and learns he immediately puts into practice (cf. 2Cel 10; 1Cel 22). This is what brings him not only to radically live the Gospel but also to re-produce and re-present the very life of Jesus.

Our formation, initial and ongoing, is usually not experiential. It may be that they have carried out and still carry out experiments in formation, especially in the sphere of initial formation, but this does not mean that we are dealing with an experiential formation. Here also it must be remembered that Francis was a man of deep evangelical experience, which brought him to preach what he had experienced (cf. 1Cel 27.29; 2Cel 8; 23; 14).

There is no continuity between our initial and ongoing formation. At times we demand of the friars in initial formation –and not only in the sphere of JPIC- that we, who are in ongoing formation, are not disposed to do.

These two gaps are, in many cases, lead to a divorce between life and knowledge and which cause our witness, on not a few occasions, to be less than credible.

6. Challenges to On-going and Initial Formation

Among the many challenges that are put to formation in relation to JPIC, the most important, it seems to me, are the following:

To form and be formed in an incarnated and practical spirituality. Formation in

the key of JPIC is animated and sustained by a spirituality rooted in life, with its density of injustice and conflict, of hope and project. For this reason, for everyone involved in formation, it is a requirement to develop a “contemplative attitude capable of listening to God” in the concrete life (cf. Ratio 60), in a contemplative attitude capable of discovering the presence of God in the world (cf. Ratio 56, 2b). We cannot take refuge, or allow our brothers in initial formation to take refuge, in a private, elusive, quietist and interior spiritualism. It is necessary to bind strongly spirituality and vital historical praxis. This is not to drain spirituality through action but to make it the path and seed of the transformation of reality, first of all of our own reality and then, or at the same time, of the reality of others.

The Constitutions are very clear when they demand of us a life close to the poor and with the least, in the condition of minors (cf. GGCC 65; 66; 2; Ratio 159). In this sense it is understood that the Ratio puts the “sense of justice, peace and respect for creation” (Ratio 156) among the criteria to be kept in mind at the time of admitting a man to solemn profession. Formation, ongoing and initial, that has, among other objectives, that of having the friar minor commit himself to the transformation of society “in the sense of justice, peace and respect for creation” must awaken in the friar an identification of judgment and feeling, of mind and heart with the

humblest of people (cf. Ratio 162). Only in that way can we be credible promoters of JPIC, just as the Constitutions and the Ration ask of us (cf. GGCC 68; Ratio 21; 25; 32; 180).

To be formed or to form others in a spirituality that will lead us to a contemplation of God in the poor and to an effective compassion for them. The ratio calls attention to the need for incarnation into the concrete situations of people among whom we live and for discovering in them the different faces of the poor Christ (cf. Ratio 33). One result of this contemplation will be the effective compassion for the most poor. Francis discovered in the poor the poor Christ, undoubtedly “suffering with” the poor, assuming their very condition and suffering in his own flesh the consequences of this condition.

From the beginning of the formative process the friar must familiarize his heart and sight to the different faces of the Crucified. In this way, while fulfilling one of the objectives of formation, to discover the Crucified Christ in the face of the “crucified”, a very good means of formation, in so far as these faces are being formed, is found.

6.1. Challenges to On-going Formation

In my opinion, the principal challenges that formation, in the key of JPIC, throws down to ongoing formation are the following:

The significance of our life. I think our

life is presented in general as being greatly “bourgeois”, “comfortable”, “rich” ... and, as a result, scarcely significant. Here a question is posed: what significance has the making of the vow of poverty for each one of us in the concrete situation in which we live?

The “Exodus” towards new “frontiers”. Here the questions multiply: Where are we? Who are we with?

To give witness “ad intra” to our being “equal”. To witness with our lives to our being “brothers”, living reconciliation on the basis of pardon. To witness “ad intra” to our option for justice. All to make our message more credible “ad extra”.

To denounce without compromise the different forms of violence and injustice that is found round about us, giving our voice to those without a voice.

To maintain a balance in our pastoral activities in such a way that the triple ministry of Jesus is presented: the prophetic, liturgical and social ministries.

6.2. Challenges to Initial Formation

There are also some challenges to initial formation that we cannot ignore. In my opinion the most important are:

To pass from a “bourgeois” formation to an “inculturated” formation, from a “permissive” formation, for fear of losing candidates or to justify our options in life, to a “demanding” formation.

To pass from a purely “academic” formation to an “experiential” and “practical” formation.

To pass from a “sectional” formation to an “integral” and “all embracing” formation.

Conclusion

JPIC forms an integral part of our charism. It, therefore, has to be a principle, criteria and objective of formation. There are some important gaps but these cannot cause us to undervalue the achievements already attained. The

challenges are many, but they could all be reduced to the need to become informed, to be made sensitive to them and carry out concrete actions in favor of JPIC. In short, it is a matter of putting into action, at the same time, the mind (information), the heart (sensitivity) and the feet (concrete action). Looking back on the road already traveled in recent years we cannot but look to the future with optimism. The seed is already in the ground...