

# ***JPIC in Integration Into Initial Formation: Post-Novitiate Level***

*Joseph Rozansky OFM*

## **Introduction**

In the document “Priorities: 1997-2003,” we are presented with the plan of action proposed by our General Minister, Giacomo Bini, and his council. In the section on formation, Provinces are asked to draw up or review their own Program for Formation so that all formation (initial and ongoing) has as its aim “to form true Friars Minor.” Formation is seen as the soil in which all of the other priorities (spirit of prayer and devotion; communion of life in fraternity; life in minority, poverty and solidarity; evangelization and mission) will be able to flourish, allowing us to follow the Gospel more closely by laying out more specifically the manner in which we are called to incarnate the Franciscan charism authentically in our time.

Among the many values cited in the Priorities document as necessary to help make us “true Friars Minor,” we find numerous references to attitudes and actions that demonstrate a deep concern for the area of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. We are reminded that our Fraternity is one of Minors, and of how poverty allows us to “become

wholly available to the Lord and in solidarity with our brothers, especially with the poorest,” and to “become a ‘sign’ of a choice of life inspired by the words and example of the Lord who was sent to evangelize the poor.” The document also notes that: “The friars in their lives and in their words should be promoters of justice, and heralds and builders of peace and reconciliation, so as to be prophetic signs which fearlessly denounce all that which destroys the dignity of man and of creation.”

The Ratio Formationis Franciscanae (1991) orients formation in the Order, and is the fruit of reflection on renewal in this area since the General Chapter of 1967. It encompasses the thought of the General Chapters of Medellin (1971) and Madrid (1973), of the Plenary Council of 1981, and of the General Constitutions of 1987. In his article on “Justice and Peace in the Ratio Formationis Franciscanae,” found in the OFM JPIC Manual, Jose Arregui points out that the Ratio is “not a document of formation expressed in terms of justice and peace. Nevertheless all the fundamental co-ordinates of Justice and Peace are found there explicitly, often as an explicit focus, always as a real background” (p. 29). The spirituality of the Ratio is that of the following of Jesus, the Just and Peaceful one; it is a spirituality that contemplates God in the vic-tims; and a spirituality of incarnation and praxis (pp. 29-32). In terms of objectives which are related to Justice and Peace, Arregui notes that the Ratio encourages a triple attitude and action: to see reality

from the perspective of the poor, to develop an effective compassion for those who are poorest, and to promote action in favor of Justice in Peace and of Peace in Justice (pp. 32-36). Finally, the Ratio proposes stances, or postures, that speak of a commitment to Justice and Peace. First, we are called to be “faithful” to today’s world; we do this by being attentive to the signs of the times, to the actual needs of the world and the persons who live in it, and to the discovery of new and creative ways for the promotion and diffusion of Gospel values. Second, we are challenged to become “inserted” in the life and reality of the people with whom we are called to live out our vocation. Third, we are called to a dialogue with the world and to a respect for those who are different from ourselves (pp. 36-39).

Without question, the documents of the Order in general, and those dealing with formation in particular, hold out commitment to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation as a fundamental characteristic of Franciscan life. If the aim of formation is to “form true Friars Minor, it must then promote the values of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation and encourage action that will bring them about. The biggest challenge in this regard is the translation of beautiful words into effective works. All friars, but especially those who are involved in the ministry of formation, must be convinced of the need to make concern for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation an integral part of the formation process.

### **Application to Post-Noviciate Formation**

While JPIC issues are to be introduced at all levels, there are some characteristics of post-noviciate formation that offer special opportunities for such inclusion. Foremost is the need for the friar to “grow in active participation in, co-responsibility for, and identification with, the life and work of the local and provincial fraternity” (Ratio, #147). He also “gradually assumes ever more responsibility for his mission in the Church and in the world...” (Ratio, #148). We must see to it that increased exposure to the ministry of the Order and the Church actually encourages the friars in formation to reflect on and deepen their commitment to Justice and Peace. This can only happen when they come in contact with the poor and marginalized, when they are urged to consider poverty and the unjust structures that sustain it, when they are challenged to study the environment and the problems that threaten nature in today’s world. If the ministries available to the men in formation never raise such issues, it is a judgment upon the programs that are in place.

Furthermore, the men in formation are at times the people who are most moved by the message of our Franciscan documents in the area of JPIC. They are inspired by the call to itinerancy, the call for a deeper commitment to living out our vocation in poverty as Minors, the call for insertion into the lives and reality of the people we serve. While they do not have all the answers to the questions about where

we need and ought to be in terms of our life and ministry, they do bring a fresh enthusiasm to the quest. We must be open to listening to their dreams and desires, and to experimenting with new commitments that can stretch our willingness to be engaged in ministries that raise issues of justice and peace.

In regard to the studies that are an important component of post-noviciate formation, the Ratio proposes a Franciscan theology that addresses the challenges of our time. We need a theology of Creation that nourishes praise of the Creator, teaches respect for created things and brings the light of faith to bear on the ecological problems of our time. We need a Christology that makes present the salvation and the liberation offered by God in response to the appeals and the needs of the poor. We need a theology that leads to respect for the human person and human rights, and which aims at construction of a fraternal world, with special concern for issues of justice, peace and ecumenism (Ratio, #167). Such an emphasis in initial formation will help to encourage a reassessment of our operative theology on the level of ongoing formation as well.

Finally, we need to understand how considerations of JPIC in post-noviciate formation can influence the spiritual life of the temporary professed friars. The most important principle to be employed here is that we cannot separate considerations of prayer life and fraternity from considerations about Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. We need to see that

proclaiming justice is part of our Gospel lives. Donal Dorr offers a helpful way to approach this question. In the first chapter of *Spirituality and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984) Dorr addresses the issue of a balanced spirituality. He reflects on a verse from the book of the prophet Micah: "This is what Yahweh asks of you, only this: that you act justly, that you love tenderly, that you walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). In these three injunctions Dorr sees the cornerstone of true conversion and the basis for a balanced spirituality. "Walking humbly with our God" reminds us of our need for ongoing religious conversion that involves our personal relationship with God and our efforts to discern God's presence in our own lives and in the lives of others. To "love tenderly" demands that we undergo a moral conversion. It is a summons to be "centered-on-others," a call to be genuinely interested in others and to love those we encounter in our face-to-face contacts with people. To "act justly" requires a political conversion. Political conversion goes beyond the interpersonal sphere of moral conversion, and challenges the would-be disciple of Jesus to help build a society that is fundamentally just. It requires that we understand how society is organized and how the Gospel speaks to these social structures on the local, national and international levels. Dorr maintains that spirituality is likely to become distorted if any one of the three dimensions of conversion is missing. Cultivating a spirituality in formation that encompasses all three con-

versions will allow the temporary professed to attend to the traditional elements of life with God and fraternal life, while at the same time being stretched to include JPIC concerns as fundamental to our life and mission. As the bishops united in Synod declared in 1971: “Action on

behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appears 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.”