

RATIO FORMATIONIS ORDINIS FRATRUM MINORUM CAPUCCINORUM

CHAPTER II

***The dimensions of Formation
from a Capuchin Franciscan perspective***

Since formation tends towards the transformation of the whole person in Christ, it must be life-long, as regards both human values and the evangelical and consecrated life. Therefore, formation must involve both the actions and intentions of the whole person in its various dimensions—human, cultural, spiritual, pastoral, and professional—taking every care to foster the harmonious integration of the various aspects. (Const. 23, 2)

- To guide your reading -

1. The meaning of chapter II

Integration is the key word as we enter this second chapter. Every formation process must integrate, in a balanced way, all the dimensions that constitute the human person: human, spiritual, intellectual, professional, etc. The task is to bring these dimensions together with freedom and creativity, so that our formation processes do not end up by *de-forming* the person, producing men who are *psychologically and emotionally unbalanced*. All the dimensions are equally important and must be present.

These dimensions do not exist in a sterile environment; they are all channelled through one's own cultural and charismatic values. The present chapter is an attempt to read the formative dimensions in the light of the charismatic values that make up our identity, based on the fundamental principles of Franciscan anthropology. It is only by starting from these coordinates that we can discover what is specific to our vocation and form of life.

No. 4, 2 of our Constitutions clearly and succinctly expresses the four essential elements of our identity, which will be constantly referred to throughout this chapter: *Brotherhood and minority are original features of the charism given to us by the Spirit. They also shape the contemplative and apostolic dimensions of our vocation. Docile to the same Spirit, we commit ourselves to live this gospel ideal to the full.*

2. Style, structure and methodology

In chapter 1 we presented the figure of Saint Francis using *poetic* language, so that the universal symbolism of his character would inspire our form of life in the different cultures. For its part, chapter II, in accordance with its didactic content, uses the language of *exhortation*, reserving a *normative* style only for chapter III.

The text is divided into 5 parts. Part 1, closely related to chapter 1, deals with the charismatic dimension, which in turn guarantees the specifically Capuchin-Franciscan content of the other four dimensions.

The text results from reflection by the members of the CIF (International Formation Council), with input from various experts and from guidelines appearing in the recent document from the Congregation for the Clergy: *The gift of the priestly vocation. Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (8 December, 2016).

3. What we are aiming for

We express once again our desire and intention that our *Ratio Formationis* will be collective, dynamic and open to the proposals and suggestions of the brothers. The participation of everyone is decisive.

Participation in the revision of chapters II and III will be geared mainly, but not exclusively, to the houses of formation. We ask formators and those in formation to critically check to see whether the 5 dimensions outlined here are present in the particular stage in which they currently find themselves.

We continue to insist on one of the central objectives of our *Ratio*: unity of charism in cultural diversity. Through study and shared reflection on these chapters, we hope that proposals and insights will emerge that will help us capture the wealth of these dimensions, in each culture in which our Capuchin charism is lived.

4. Keys for interpretation

- **Anthropological:**

Franciscan anthropology is characteristically dynamic and positive, while taking the realities of *relationship and experience* as its fundamental interpretative categories.

- **Christological:**

The person of Jesus always puts us in a state of healthy tension between the divine and the human. *Discipleship*, as a style of life, appears as the link that integrates all the dimensions. One must be careful not to reduce discipleship, the following of Christ, to something academic, moralistic or merely individual.

- **Franciscan:**

The category of discipleship, in Franciscan Christology, focuses on the contemplation of the mysteries of the humanity of Jesus, especially in the events of His birth, passion and death. On the other hand, relationships, considered in a Franciscan key, make *brotherhood* the proper environment for the growth and integration of the various dimensions.

- **Capuchin:**

Simplicity-moderation is the category that best defines the Capuchin interpretation of reality. Here, that which is simple and uncomplicated becomes a search for essentials. Another category that belongs to our charism is *reform*, understood as an existential need for continuous updating and renewal.

The dimensions of Formation from a Capuchin Franciscan perspective

1. The Capuchin reform dared to re-interpret the Franciscan form of life. The secret lies in going back, again and again, to Brother Francis, the *Forma Minorum*, not simply in order to repeat his experiences, but to recreate his genuine insights in new cultural contexts. Fidelity and creativity are key dispositions if we wish to follow Christ more nearly, and love Him more dearly. With the *Testament of Francis* in their memory, Capuchins set themselves the task of rediscovering a more simple, more fraternal lifestyle, in solitary places but not isolated from people, living in simple structures that do not compromise freedom, seeking silence whereby they can together listen to the Gospel Word and put it into practice at the service of the most humble.

2. Formation continues to be a priority in the Church and the Order. The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (1992; n° 43-59), in harmony with the basic areas of human growth, indicates the four dimensions which must always be present in any formation plan: the human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral. Later on, another post-synodal document, *Vita consecrata* (1996; n° 65), adds the charismatic, specific to formation for religious life.

3. The charismatic dimension highlights what is specific to the form of life of each religious family, in other words, its own values, by whose diversity the Church herself is enriched. In their turn, the charismatic values, in a dynamically creative way, give their specific tone to the other dimensions. It is an ever-unfinished task, which ensures that our form of life and presence in the Church has meaning. Equally, the values of our charism are in close harmony with the great human values of love, liberty and justice, lived in a gospel perspective.

4. *Goodness* is the thread, drawn from our charism, that shows how all the dimensions are related. Franciscan anthropology, with its characteristic dynamism and optimism, opens the whole of the formation process, presenting a Way (*itinerarium*) in which the profound and sincere desire (*desiderium*) for goodness (*bonum*) occupies the heart's centre, inviting us to empty ourselves of everything that prevents or blocks the original goodness (*paupertas*). Only non-appropriation can guarantee relationships that are both *free* and *freely given* (*gratis*).

5. *The method of integration* requires that all the dimensions, with their respective charismatic force, are present, in a step-by-step progression, in the different stages of the formation process. Formation for the consecrated life must always have priority, avoiding the danger that intellectual formation for ordained ministries may eventually alter the nature of our charismatic form of life and transform the formation fraternities into diocesan seminaries.

I. Charismatic dimension. The gift of being a lesser brother

Let us refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High, acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him from whom all good comes. (RnB, 17, 17)

I.I. Our charism as gift

6. Gratuity is the very heart of what is Franciscan. We have received everything as a free gift, so that we can freely give it in return. The formation process helps us to recognise gratefully and to welcome responsibly the precious gift of our own life and vocation. These gifts are not given for our own benefit, but for others. Consecration calls for the gift of self, after the manner of Jesus, who gave up His life freely and generously for the good of humanity. The fraternity is the first place where we give ourselves, and where we also become responsible for the different gifts of the brothers.

7. The primacy of Goodness lies at the heart of the Franciscan vision of life. Our world, in God's eyes, is good. This optimism about man and creation, far from encouraging an ingenuous position in the face of the shadows and pains that humans cause and suffer, inserts us more fully into the very depths of everything that happens, and invites us to rediscover the goodness, buried by injustice, which belongs to every creature and especially to human beings. Our vocation to be brothers is realised by spreading and strengthening goodness.

8. To desire to live like Jesus, in a fraternity, in the midst of our world, in simplicity and joy, is to receive God's greatest gift. Brotherhood and minority are the marks of our identity: to be the brother of all without excluding anyone; to welcome as a matter of preference the smallest ones in our society; to be free in the face of all temptation to power; to be rich in emotions and sentiments; to live out a healthy tension between contemplation (the place where the desire for Goodness is forged) and mission (the place where we freely share the good things received, in solidarity). Our Capuchin form of life is a gift of God to the Church and society.

I.II. Brotherhood

9. God shows His identity in His way of relating. Goodness communicates itself through the free and freely given love between the divine persons. The Creator takes nothing to Himself as His own; on the contrary, He desires to share it with us. The Father, source of all good, offers us in His Son a model of humanity and a project for living it, and in the Holy Spirit gives us His strength and creativity by which to make it a reality. When we construct ourselves in relationship with others and for others, we are building our identity in the image and likeness of the Trinity, sharing the goodness we have received and establishing among ourselves relationships based on love, liberty and justice.

10. Without relationships there is no brotherhood. To be precise, our first task and vocation is to become lesser brothers, in the style of Jesus, who did not cling to His condition as Son, but became the brother of all, without excluding anyone. Fraternal relationships offer us a space for human and spiritual growth, in which we learn, all together in brotherhood, to live, contemplate, study, reflect, discern and decide.

I.III. Minority

11. Jesus presents us with a God who loves to make Himself small, and to reveal Himself to humble and simple folk. It is on the cross, in the mystery of God's smallness revealed, that love becomes real in an act of total expropriation and unconditional self-giving. This is the foundation of minority. This is something qualitative, not quantitative, which in turn shapes our own desires, unmasking the temptation to be great and do great things. Francis discovers in the poor and the crucified the art of building free relationships, and a new way of looking at the world centred on what is fundamental. Moving in that same direction, the Capuchin reform managed to combine in a wonderful way simplicity in moderation with the the search for the essential.

12. The essential always has to do with relationships. Welcome, dialogue and acceptance of diversity are indispensable if one wishes to build relationships that are transparent and inclusive in our fraternities. Minority is also openness of mind, and flexibility when faced with any cultural or religious ideology that would threaten our charismatic identity and prevents us from giving witness to our life of brotherhood and co-operation at various levels among ourselves.

I.IV. Contemplation

13. The contemplative gaze of God rests on the poor in heart, the afflicted, the dispossessed, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure of heart, the peacemakers and those who suffer persecution in the cause of right (Mt 5, 3-10). Contemplation means to desire to see things through the eyes of God, to see what others do not dare to look at. Whoever listens to God's voice prepares his ears to hear the cries of the poor. The Capuchin reform was born with a profound desire to return to the hermitages and lonely places, so favourable to an encounter with Christ poor and crucified, where silence is transformed into service and consolation for the victims of the plague, and contemplation becomes compassion.

14. To contemplate together means sharing quality time and space to give thanks together for the gifts we have received. Prayer is grateful praise born of contemplation, when we discover the goodness of God living in us. The practice of contemplation purifies and transforms our images of God until we reach the God of free self-giving, who in turn is the foundation for that gratuity with which we build our fraternal relationships. Without contemplation there is no brotherhood.

I. V. Mission

15. *Freely you have received, so give freely* (Mt 10, 8). A genuinely lowly and contemplative brotherhood becomes aware of the needs and sufferings of others and opens up to search for new ways of justice, peace and care for creation. Our mission is to uncover all the good there is around us, to protect it and help it grow, and to share it, principally with those who are unjustly deprived of the goods of the earth which are common to all and meant for all.

16. The age of the individual pastoral project is over. We are not formed to be heroes, but brothers, and to testify to the beauty of the Gospel through the world of our relationships. The life of brotherhood is the first way by which we evangelise; therefore, all that we do is an expression of the fraternity. As Capuchins we continue to be sent where no-one else wishes to go, to commit ourselves together to create oases of brotherhood in conflict zones and distant outposts: privileged spaces in which to live out the gift of gratuity.

I.VI. Reform

17. The Capuchin reform is not only a past historical event, it is an attitude to life that forms part of our charismatic identity. The desire to be constantly renewed invites us to look within, while avoiding nostalgia for the past, and to take on the risks involved in our journey towards an unwritten future. Faced with profound social change, the Christian response is not one of fear, enclosing us within the false, illusory security of traditionalism. On the contrary, only faith and confidence can help us discern the road ahead. We must get up and walk, begin again, with the Gospel and the insights of Francis and Clare in our hearts. And always together.

II. The human Dimension. *Learning to be a brother to all*

What a person is before God, that he is, and no more, (Adm. XIX)

18. The rapid cultural changes are transforming not just what we do, but also what we are. The Internet and the social media have broken down the traditional boundaries of time and space, opening up new ways of understanding the world and human relationships. Franciscan anthropology today stresses the dynamic character of all creation. In its dynamism, every creature is called to attain its fullness. Identity is forged and expressed in the act of being alive. From this fact arise the questions about who I wish to be, how do I wish to live and what values do I wish to hold. How we integrate into this world, and how we participate in the current structures of society, culture and the Church, depends on us. God creates us with the capacity and responsibility to build our own personal and institutional identity.

II.I. Positive anthropology. Human beings as *Imago Dei*

19. *Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves ... God saw all He had made, and indeed it was very good* (Gn 1,26. 31). Far from any kind of pessimism regarding human beings, Franciscan thought enthusiastically glimpses the goodness of every creature. We speak of *original grace*, meaning the goodness that God has placed in each one of us, the capacity to recognise God as the source of all Good, and in consequence, of the good that He accomplishes through each and every one of His creatures.

20. God, the Supreme Good, through the mystery of the Incarnation has made us sharers in His goodness, proposing to us His Son Jesus as our reference and model of all that is human, and as the source of all fullness: His freedom, His way of loving and His commitment to justice are for us ways to human and spiritual growth. Our formation, through a process of personalised accompaniment, provides the necessary tools by which we become men who are truly free, emotionally mature and compassionate.

21. We become truly adult when we know the motivations that move our life and when we act in accordance with them. In religious life, the way of maturation and purification of motives requires that we know ourselves, that we accept our own psycho-social reality, and requires, too, the capacity to give oneself. Jesus too, in a dynamic and free manner, built His own identity, choosing to make His fundamental choices coincide with the plan of God the Father for Him. It is a question of having the same mind as Jesus, of internalising His values. Assimilation and transformation are the final result of the formation process.

II II. The existential dimensions of the human person: *solitude and relationship*

22. One who is unable to be alone is unable to live with others. And vice-versa; because neither solitude nor brotherhood are a refuge for anyone who has difficulties with facing himself or encountering others. An inability to manage times of solitude and silence is often a source of conflicts, generally affective in nature. Interior silence and contemplative solitude make the encounter with self possible, and stimulate a capacity for critical reflection, a necessary condition for dialogue and communication with the brothers.

23. *Ultimate* solitude and relationship constitute the foundation of Franciscan anthropology. Our lifestyle reflects who we are and the position we take up in the world. Brotherly relationships make us more human and, at the same time, protect us from individualism and self-sufficiency. Only someone who is free is capable of creating areas of inter-dependence: without liberty, there is no human dignity or healthy affective relationships. If we wish for a world of healthy affectivity, like that of Jesus, establishing relationships of free self-giving, we must know our own capacities, so that we manage our feelings, emotions and desires more soundly, and direct our whole lives toward the Good.

24. Liberty frees us from everything that is an obstacle to the presence of goodness, and makes us capable of loving something other than ourselves; the issue is to be open to others. In the life of the fraternity, each one seeks as his priority the good of the other, since relationships are nourished by the good that God accomplishes through each brother. A critical conscience makes discernment between good and evil possible, because to refuse to take responsibility for one's own actions leads, on not a few occasions, to growth in evil. Real goodness is shared, and is recognised by its inclusive character. We reach the point of doing good when we practice mercy and compassion. On the other hand, evil always feeds insensitivity, and a lack of solidarity is an indication of its presence. Always, the greatest evil is indifference.

25. The processes of formation for our life must give more attention to the psycho-affective and sexual dimensions. This is a rich and complex reality that permeates the whole of life and requires a multiple approach, which takes account of the advances in the social and human sciences, especially in neuro-science. Franciscan identity underlines a number of elements which, interpreted on the basis of the different cultural contexts, help us to steer our sexual identity in a particular direction: towards contemplative silence, brotherly relationships, encounters with the poor, manual work by which our bodies come into contact with the earth, a passion for the Kingdom, a commitment to justice ... all these are potential areas of healthy gratification, and are necessary if we are to be able to integrate positively all of our psycho-sexual energy. The cultivation of true friendship helps us to love and to freely allow ourselves to be loved.

26. A life without passion and without risk is a life that is sad and boring. Traditionally, *eros* translates as passion and creativity, while *agape* better expresses gratuity in relationships. *Agape* frees *eros* from the desire to possess and to have power, which turns persons into mere objects of pleasure in order to satisfy one's own needs. For its part, when *eros* is integrated and channelled, never denied or repressed, it allows *agape* to desire passionately: to seek God, to be like Jesus, to enjoy human relationships and friendships.

II.III. Every human being is a creature, unique and unrepeatable

27. Franciscan tradition rediscovers the value of the concrete individual. God has created us unique and unrepeatable, with different gifts and talents. Every brother is an individual work of art, who, exercising his personal freedom, has to discover his own capacities and the creative way in which he is to contribute them to the world.

28. Francis presents himself as *Homo nudus*. Nudity is an image of creatureliness. To be a creature means accepting that one is poor, in order to be rich in sentiments and experiences. This requires that one lets go of one's fears and insecurities, and achieves a harmonious integration of the limitations proper to the human condition. Only when we are poor and naked, like Jesus on the cross and Francis at the hour of his death, do we experience true freedom.

29. *Praise to you, my Lord, for our sister bodily death.* Death belongs to the human condition. One who is capable of imagining his own death and relating to it as to a sister is able to give meaning and significance to his life. In death, all experience is accomplished. Francis received death with a song on his lips (*mortem cantando suscepit*, writes Celano). This is not a case of joy separated from pain; on the contrary, it is the moment in which everything one has lived, suffered and loved is not lost but becomes transparent. In the end, nothing is forgotten, everything is welcomed. Life is a gift, and death is part of that immense gift. We could even call it God's last gift, because only the experience of death awakens us out of the dream of omnipotence and returns us to our reality as creatures, to a life rich and full of experiences, lived by someone who has emptied himself in order to be filled, once and for all, with love and liberty.

III. The spiritual dimension. *Learning to desire*

Blessed is that religious who takes no pleasure and delight except in the most holy words and deeds of the Lord. (Adm. XX)

30. Human beings are constitutionally religious. The spiritual dimension opens and completes the formation of every man and woman. Admiration, surprise and amazement are gateways inviting us to set out on a journey: to search for the meaning of our individual and collective lives. To be precise, the God of Christians, through His Word, comes to meet everyone who searches for Him. And this Word has a real face: Jesus of Nazareth, in whom we see the true faces of God and of man. To follow Him dispels all the fears that prevent us from living.

31. The anxious need to satisfy every need immediately ends by annihilating them. Desire is an art that requires a permanent attitude of purification of our deepest motives. From the superficial we arrive at the essential, and there we find the true desires that are woven into the meaning of life. Jesus occupies the centre of our desires: to be a lesser brother consists precisely in having His sentiments and principles, His relational style, His way of understanding and living life, His capacity to direct His every desire, always and at every moment, towards the Good.

III. I. Francis, *Homo totus evangelicus*. The spirituality of listening

32. Francis, a *living commentary on the Word of God*, was never a deaf hearer of the Gospel. He resolved to follow Jesus more closely, and, through the words of the Gospel, established a personal relationship with Him that permeated every dimension of his life. Even today, Jesus continues to speak to us through the Gospel, inviting us to enter a personal, affective relationship that goes beyond merely intellectual knowledge or information about His words.

33. Our charism is founded upon listening to the Gospel and putting it into practice. For every lesser brother, the Gospel thus becomes the *humus* of our formation: *This is the rule and life of the Lesser Brothers: to live in accordance with the form of the holy Gospel* (RB 1). Francis is represented as the model of spiritual life (*forma*

minorum), helping us to overcome fundamentalism on the one hand, and devotional sentimentality on the other, by placing the relational dimension at the heart of everything: a personal encounter with Jesus, alive and present in His Word. Without such an encounter there is no experience of life.

34. In his Admonitions, Francis recalls that, regarding the Scriptures, there are two attitudes: that of those who *only wish to know the words and interpret them for others, and that of those who do not wish to own the word, but return it to the Most High Lord God, to Whom every Good belongs* (Adm VII). To appropriate the Word to ourselves and be content with mere analysis and academic knowledge prevents us from growing and opening up to the relational aspect. Conversely, the dynamic of “giving back” – giving and receiving - helps us to grow and to transform our own lives and those of our fraternities.

35. The Word of God has been entrusted to the People of God, the Church. We must insist on the centrality of the ecclesial principle: it is the Christian community, not the individual person, which is the original and primary setting where one *listens to, interprets and discerns* the Word. For us, the Christian community is the fraternity. Brotherly communion among those who share the dream of the Gospel is the space for discernment that best fosters human and spiritual growth. It helps each brother at the different stages of life to enter into dialogue with the surrounding world, and with his own inner world, in a dynamic process of personalisation that avoids all subjectivism.

III. II. Following Jesus: a journey of beauty and freedom

36. The religious life, like every Christian calling, is born of listening to the Word. Evangelical radicalism consists in making the Gospel one's own form of life. Only love, beauty and goodness can explain the mystery of our vocation. As followers of Christ, poor, obedient and chaste, we embark on a journey that moulds the core areas of our life, in which our identity and belonging are expressed.

37. The spirit of the Beatitudes (Mt 5,3-12) is the natural framework for the symbolic interpretation of our consecration: blessed are those who desire and dream of having a heart that is pure (poverty), humble (obedience) and clear (chastity), because the grace of the Holy Spirit will turn obedience into a source of liberty and authenticity; will make poverty the source of justice and solidarity that gives and shares itself; and will make chastity a source of life that is fruitful, rich in affective relationships and tender sentiments.

38. The Franciscan way of living the religious vows is an invitation to overcome any tendency to reduce poverty to materialistic considerations and the temptation to be indifferent. It opens up ways of seeking what is essential, and of preventing material things from becoming obstacles to our fraternal relationships. Equally, it protects us from reducing obedience to psychological considerations, and from the temptation to individualism, by creating fraternal spaces of interdependence. Finally, it alerts us to the danger of reducing chastity to biology, and to the temptation to be sad at heart, by putting forward the goal of an affective life that is

open, capable of integrating solitude and bringing us closer to the poor and suffering.

III. III. Contemplation: an invitation to discipleship

39. Formation processes that do not promote silence and interiority run the risk of underpinning a superficial and devotional spirituality. Silence, far from alienating us from people's difficulties, enables us to hear the cries and lamentations of our world, and to be sensitive to those who utter them. Without some time for deep silence there is no prayer or contemplation. Those beginning the journey of formation for our life need to be open to and capable of gradually giving up any previous images of God that prevent a truly searching and listening attitude.

40. Capuchin tradition has handed down to us various methods of mental and affective prayer. One of these, very much in harmony with the bible, proposes a faith-ful reading of a text, followed by analysis of the attitudes of the different personalities that feature in the biblical text. We identify with one of them, and pass from being mere spectators to protagonists inhabited by the Word.

41. Franciscan contemplation has its own characteristics. As a fraternity we contemplate the poor and naked Christ, who identifies with the poor and the suffering. To contemplate, in this case, means to allow God's gaze to rest on us, to look, and allow ourselves to be looked at, to love, and let ourselves be loved, renouncing all attempt to appropriate or dominate what we are contemplating. All our effort must consist in doing nothing. He is the protagonist, not us. Love is what will gradually transform us into that which we contemplate, introducing us to the pedagogy of self-donation, where all that we receive is given back to us. The fruits of contemplation are to be given back, without forgetting that in the Franciscan perspective the ultimate aim of every contemplative act is always compassion.

III. IV. The sacramental life, devotions and holiness

42. The sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation occupy a fundamental place in our daily life. In the Eucharist, that mystery of love and justice, Jesus continues to become the *Bread of Life*, freely giving Himself up so as to feed our desire that we too will become bread that is given to others. At the same time, aware of the fragility of human relationships and of the tendency to appropriate, the sacrament of Reconciliation helps us to overcome all temptation to pessimism, and to place all our trust in the transforming power of love. So as not to fall into devotionalism, let us avoid the individual celebration of the sacraments.

43. Through the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as joining in the universal prayer of the Church, we are in some way united with the joys and sufferings of our world. The psalms bring together in a single voice the voices of all people: all human experiences, sentiments and emotions, from joy-filled praise to loud lament, sustained always by hope. Nothing that is human is foreign to us. The liturgical

sensitivity and creativity of St Francis, along with the simple liturgical celebrations of the first Capuchins, should always be a source of inspiration and renewal.

44. Holy Mary, *Daughter* of the Father, *Mother* of the Son and *Spouse* of the Holy Spirit, is the form of the Church and the model of all disciples, because she believed and put into practice the teachings of the one Master. Together with her, the spiritual wisdom of Clare and Francis is a fruitful reference point on our ongoing journey to Christ.

45. Even today, the ultimate purpose of our life is to become holy. The proposal to be a *Capuchin*, a *missionary* and a *saint* has brought many fruits of holiness to the Church. However, new sensitivities nowadays invite us to move beyond the model of the heroic sanctity of an individual, and to give greater attention to fraternal life as a source of holiness: communities made holy by their commitment to Christian discipleship and their creation of life-plans that are worthy and bear fruit.

IV. THE INTELLECTUAL DIMENSION. *Learning to think with the heart*

*Where there is charity and wisdom,
there is neither fear nor ignorance
(Adm. XXVII).*

46. *Weakness of identity* is one of the characteristics of our culture. Without an identity we fade away existentially. The different formation stages ought to help us build up a mindset (*forma mentis*) that feeds and sustains the different ways of giving meaning to reality (*forma vitae*): if you do not live as you think, you end up thinking about how you are living. To be precise, Franciscan thought presents a particular way of contemplating and living out the inexhaustible and varied depths of the mystery of reality. Its starting point is philosophical and theological reflection on what Francis experienced in his own life.

47. For a Franciscan, the intellectual dimension cannot be reduced to study. On the contrary, it dynamically integrates the other dimensions of life in a vision of Franciscan thought in which the intelligence directs the will towards love. In this process, priority is given to the affective way of coming to know reality: you only know well that which you love.

IV.I. Learning how to learn

48. For anyone choosing fraternal life as the space for human and spiritual growth, some elements are indispensable: a capacity for relationships, an open mind, tolerance and flexibility. The wisdom of life invites us to integrate our own abilities and limitations, and even to discover that mistakes are part of the way we learn. With humility, we recognise the abilities God has given us for the service of the fraternity. The gifts by which God has enriched our lives are both gift and responsibility. Life in brotherhood requires us to protect the gifts of the brothers, accepting the wealth of diversity and casting all fear aside: *I was afraid, and I hid*

your talent in the earth; it was yours, and you can have it back. (Mt 25, 25). God will call us to account for what He has given us.

49. Today's culture is full of anthropological challenges which call for great sensitivity in our formation, in that we must come close to the mystery of the human person, in a manner that is demanding, critical and humble at the same time. We are called to be *experts in humanity*, able to read and interpret the expectations and the fears of our contemporaries, understanding their motives, discerning their doubts, accompanying them in their sufferings, and, in a respectful dialogue, offering the wisdom of the Christian mystery as the meaning of life.

50. The way we look at the world cannot be divorced from affectivity. God has placed the world in our hands, trusting in our responsibility and creativity. Outside of the world, outside the actual realities in which we are placed, there is no salvation. Contemplation becomes a source of knowledge, bringing tenderness and hope. Only love can heal the world's wounds, while making us aware of its imbalances. It is the human being, and not human products, that must occupy centre stage, through the creation of a culture of real brotherhood which recognises and values our need for each other, and at the same time reinforces trust in the goodness of human beings and in their capacity to practise compassion.

III. II. Insight, experience, affectivity, relationship

51. The Franciscan tradition tries to overcome the duality of life and study. The mystery of the Trinity casts light on the human faculties, broadening our vision of humanity. Thus, in the *memory*, linked to the person of the **Father**, resides *imagination* and *creativity*; in the *intelligence*, linked to the **Son**, rests the capacity to *reason* and to search for meaning; and finally, in the *will*, associated with the person of the **Holy Spirit**, resides the capacity to *desire*, which is always expressed through love.

52. In a dynamic and gradual way, human intelligence integrates the knowledge, abilities and aptitudes which give insight into the meaning of life, and directs the will so that desire finds that which is truly real, beautiful and just. Knowledge becomes wisdom, thanks to the senses, which introduce us into the world of experience and of the emotions: truth is only manifested in love. To live is to experience life, to construct our life, to reach fulfilment, to give of our best. We do not exist to fill ourselves with knowledge and to do many things. Our value lies in who we are, not in what we know or do.

53. For the Franciscan tradition, human beings are not only rational animals, they are also creatures of desire, always in contact with the God of desire. Showing someone how to think and desire correctly in a Franciscan way is also an objective of formation. In other words, it is a question of knowing *what* one desires and loves, and *how* one loves. The exercise of purification of one's will and its motives aims to foster lifestyles that are consistent with fraternal relationships, pastoral practices, with one's vision of the world, of the economy and of politics. All of this

must be gradually incorporated into one's life, in a gradual way, in each stage of formation.

III. III. Transforming the world together, on the basis of our poverty

54. The transforming power of reflection cannot be reduced to the sphere of individual, private thinking. It is the fraternity which feels, thinks, contemplates, and commits itself to action. From academic formation onwards, we must insist on the need for a methodology which favours group dynamics. In this way we learn to think together, and to overcome both a competitive or self-sufficient spirit and intellectual narcissism. At the same time, we are helped to create a communal way of thinking and to set up interdisciplinary dialogue with other areas of knowledge. It is a matter of thinking and acting together, because knowledge is not simply intelligence, but experience and life, and life consists in relationships.

55. Before teaching, one must have the humility to learn. The poor, who stand in the place of Christ, became a source of knowledge and wisdom for Francis. They are our teachers. If one wishes to have a real encounter between study and life, then the peripheries, those outer limits in geography or in life itself, are privileged places. Courage, passion and creativity, aided by intelligence and reason, team up with justice, solidarity and equality. The biggest challenge in the contemporary world is that no human being should feel excluded. Knowledge is for service.

56. Intellectual formation takes as its starting point the cultural context in which one lives: family, school, religiosity, rites, relationships, language, ways of understanding and expressing reality, etc. Consequently, the first requirement is to know and love one's own culture, without turning it into an absolute or losing the ability to be critical in the face of its limitations. On the other hand, training in intercultural awareness is becoming more and more necessary. We all need to learn to accept differences, how to be in relationship with others, and to develop an affective capacity for dialogue. The task of interpreting Franciscan thought within the different cultures is a work in progress.

57. Saint Bonaventure, in the *Itinerarium*, indicates the attitudes that are necessary for anyone embarking on study and reflection in a Franciscan perspective: *Do not assume that mere reading will suffice without fervour, speculation without devotion, investigation without admiration, observation without exaltation, industry without piety, knowledge without love, understanding without humility, study without divine grace, the mirror without wisdom inspired by God.* These words are in perfect harmony with St Francis' recommendation to St Anthony, which remains valid today: *I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers, providing that, as the Rule says, you do not "extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion" during study of this kind.*

V. THE MISSIONARY-PASTORAL DIMENSION. *Learning to proclaim and build brotherhood*

Let them not engage in arguments or disputes, but be subject to every human creature for God's sake, and let them proclaim that they are Christians. (RnB, i6)

58. *To live together as lesser brothers is a primary part of our Franciscan vocation.* (Const. 24,7), which in turn becomes the first element of evangelisation. Brotherhood and mission are our reason to exist, and it is the quality of our relationships, not pastoral efficiency, that defines our charism and makes us genuine witnesses of the Gospel.

V.I. The Son's mission: to become our brother

59. In Jesus, the Trinity is manifest as a mystery of love and communion. God has wished, freely and gratuitously, to share His inmost life with each one of us. He has chosen and predestined us to be members of His family. This is precisely what constitutes the Son's mission: to become our Brother, so that we could become sons and learn to be brothers.

60. The sacrament of baptism turns us into disciples and missionaries. We share privileged moments of intimacy with the Master when we listen to His Word, share the bread of the Eucharist and contemplate Him in the face of the poor. From this intimacy arises the desire for Mission: a desire to build the kingdom of heaven together here on earth. Without brotherhood and contemplation there is no mission.

V. II. Our vocation is ecclesial

61. Mission is the reason why the Church exists: it exists to evangelise. Jesus Himself, by washing the feet of the disciples, makes clear the meaning and mission of any ecclesial community: to love, wash and cure the wounds of our world. On the basis of its vocation to service, the Church is called to take flesh also in the "outer limits", creating oases of humanity and working for the common good, and to build peace.

62. Saint Francis, *Vir Catholicus*, submits his life-plan to the discernment of the Church, which through its magisterium helps us to understand the beauty and the demands of the gospel life. The Church recognises that his project is not an impossible dream: to live as true brothers in the midst of a world divided and in enmity is the most faith-filled and finest way to proclaim Jesus and His Gospel.

63. The charismatic force of our Capuchin vocation, committed as it is to the mission of the Church, makes us experts in communion through the witness we give of the relationships that are interwoven in the fabric of fraternal life. We are never alone, always in fraternity. No work is undertaken merely as an individual.

We are sent by the fraternity, and our mission makes sense only if we remain in communion. The community aspect of pastoral work is the best antidote against activism and individualism. It also protects us from the temptation to “apostolic narcissism”, and from many other emotional pathologies, as well as the misuse of money.

V. III. Formed for Mission

64. Mission occupies a central place in the history of the Order. All the stages of formation must keep Mission in mind. A process of continuous and consistent initiation should help us to embody the values of our charism and overcome any kind of cultural difficulty.

65. The formation plans of the different circumscriptions should foster a pastoral mentality, providing varied programs that take into account the gifts and talents of each brother. All the brothers must have the same rights and the same opportunities in formation. On the other hand, a balance must be sought between contents and experiences, in such a way that integral formation is assured. All pastoral experiences must be accompanied and evaluated in good time.

66. By the time they reach the end of initial formation, the brothers should have sufficient knowledge of the world of today, both locally and universally. They should also have acquired the necessary tools with which to discern the pastoral needs of different social and cultural environments. A lesser brother is known for his closeness and solidarity with the poor, the sick, and the immigrant; for the appreciation and respect he has for different cultures, ethnic and religious groups; for his commitment to social justice, for the challenges of peace-building, and his support for policies that protect the ecology of the planet.

67. Our world is more and more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. As a matter of urgency we need to learn our place in this new, changing reality. It is part of our mission to make space for the kind of listening and dialogue that enable faith and reason to encounter one another, between believers and unbelievers, between the different Christian confessions and different religions. This calls for openness and flexibility, avoiding any kind of fundamentalism and any attitudes that prevent us from experiencing the fragment of truth present in the love that resides in others.

68. In today's world, the means by which people relate and communicate are in a continuous process of transformation and change. Formation plans must give special attention to the question of how to integrate thought and action in the new digital languages. This must be done intelligently, critically and creatively. The mass media touch critical points in the world of our thoughts and feelings, helping us to share experiences, knowledge, work and entertainment. However, the correct use of these media according to gospel principles means that we must be alert to the risk of addiction, and to their impact on the use of free time, on fraternal relationships, on pastoral and intellectual work, etc. We need training in how to participate actively in the new digital culture, following clear principles.

69. Our life is called to be an eschatological symbol, to sustain the hope of countless men and women. Our brotherhood is an anticipation of a kingdom in which there will be no more death, no more mourning or sadness or pain (Ap 21,4). We are missionaries when we announce, through the witness of our fraternal life, the Gospel of encounter and the joy of service; when we humanise the earth by creating bonds of brotherhood; when we contemplate the beauty of creation with gratitude and admiration; when we recognise the good that God continues to accomplish in every living creature; when we join in the song of Mary, the first missionary, and proclaim the mighty deeds that God is constantly performing in each one of us.