



FIDDLESTICKS

Issue 153

Lent 2025



Reflections on OEF's 40th & Prospects for The Future

By Br. Coyote Nabhan, OEF

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I regret that my back and leg injuries kept me from joining you for The Order's anniversary and reflections on what we have learned. Because I was supposed to be on one of the four "decade" panels, and could not make, and have heard about some, but not all, of the discussions at convocation, I wish to add briefly some of what I intended to offer.

I have learned a lot-and deeply-how much getting "gender issues" right and ensuring safety and love to all our LGBTQ Order members and novitiates means to having a healthy organization. Further, for our struggles to be truly -not just nominally- inclusive may mean that we are the first Franciscan Order in the world to get that far. I value the patience of everyone in working through both content and process, and know we are not finished with that work.

At the same time, we all should be concerned that we are even less far along with getting other forms of

inclusion and diversity balanced in our Order. We need to rededicate ourselves to racial, ethnic, class and age diversity, or else we will end up like the Shakers did with no plan of perpetuating a healthy, diverse order. As an Arab American who regularly works on peace and justice issues through Muslim, Christian, Jewish dialogue; sometimes including Buddhists as well, we need to keep a welcoming rather than protective or dismissive tone to prayerful interactions with all of these groups, especially as 12 countries have been engaged in a war in the Middle East that has killed over 40,000 individuals including many children. I also worry that we have not been as open as we need to be with neuro-special individuals who wish to be part of our Order, when it is historically clear that Sts. Francis and Claire made room for these individuals' gifts during their era.

In reading the bios and community service accomplishments of OEF's members in every part of this continent and world, I value the many ways they have found to do community service, and am humbled by that.

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Reflections on OEF's 40th... continued

At the same time, we have only occasionally built in a community service day or two (as we did once at Ferguson Mo's Earth Dance multiracial farm) or in regional meetings. We have-in my mind and heart- failed to fully integrate the excitement over Pope Francis's Laudato Si and Laudate Deum into our collective work, even though many non-Franciscan Christian groups have used these documents to inspire, even though they have no organizational connection directly to Pope Francis. They are not about the Pope, they are about the future of our planet..

My own personal charism as a Franciscan is through the lens of environmental justice, which I barely ever hear surface as a group concern. I am in frequent collaboration with the Franciscan Action Network, the Yale Forum on Ecology and Religion, the Wild Church Network, the Center for Action and Contemplation, the Stanford Forum on Contemplative Ecology, the Loyola-Marymount Work Group on Desert Spirituality, etc, which I do in part because I feel our Order is insufficiently committed to these issues even though many of our sisters and brothers are on a local basis. What I am saying is that I do not expect any of my brothers and sisters to favor the same charisms I do— because I love what each of you are doing at home, but I do expect the Order to struggle as much to keep the balance right in efforts toward racial, ethnic, neuro-behavioral and environmental justice and deep contemplative practice just as much as gender justice. All these are part of our Franciscan legacy, none should be sideshows. All will be of value in recruiting a more diverse next generation of OEF-ers. Finally, I request for the fourth time that that our Convocation move away from St Louis at least once out of every three years, especially as demographics lean toward the West. We should also go Northeast now and then. Quite simply we need to mix it up and not get in a rut. My proposal for next year is to find a retreat center as close to where Dale Carmen lives, so that we may glimpse her wonderful world and deeply honor her.

My own work is now focused on founding the Sacred Plants Biocultural Recovery Initiative, with our first efforts occurring this October in the Inter-mountain and Borderlands Region, and next in the war in the Middle East. Sacred and ceremonial plants are endangered, threatened by wars and border walls, despite access and use of them being guaranteed by our Constitution. I can't think of any on-ground activity more Franciscan than relinking sacred plants to their original caretakers in praise our Creator and Creation. I ask you for prayers to help guide me in this multicultural, interfaith work.

Yours truly,
Brother Coyote

Some thoughts from Dale Carmen:

January 8, 2025

After reading many thoughtful responses to Br. Coyote's initial ideas on Interfaith Franciscans, I pulled a file on a retreat I attended 10 years ago. It was called THE PEOPLE OF GOD; A SACRED PRISM: An interfaith Conference to Celebrate the Unity and Common Life We Share in the Holy One. The retreat was April 12-14, 2015 at the Franciscan Center of Tampa, Florida; sponsored by the Joint Committee of Franciscan Unity, and the contact person was Rev. Masud Syedullah, T.S.S.F.

It was attended by OEF members Louis Canter, Bruce and Shashanah Kay, myself and perhaps some other from OEF. It was a Jewish, Christian and Muslim shared experience. We found ourselves joined together in the lineage of Abraham and Sarah, Abraham and Hagar; kinfolk on a very long journey. Led by Rabbi Shefa Gold, Imam Bashar and Rev. Masud Syedullah; we ate together, shared religious traditions and worshipped together using different instruments, tones and languages.

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Reflections on OEF's 40th... continued

One of the preparatory mail-outs to the event was a paper from the Episcopal Diocese of New York. I quote from that paper. "In 1219, St. Francis traveled to what is now northern Egypt and paid a visit to the Muslim Sultan al-Malek al-Kamil. This was at the beginning of the Fifth Crusade, but Francis and his brothers did not make this trip as part of the battle to regain the Holy Land. Rather, they went in opposition to the mainstream theological and political orthodoxies of the time, to meet the Muslim people and to live among them as "lesser brothers."

Francis and his brothers went to be present among this people who were being portrayed as evil enemies of Christ, and in his evangelism of presence, Francis found the spirit of God to be alive and at work within the Muslim people, then called "the Saracens..." While the main trend of the time was for Christian preachers to deliver strident, inflammatory sermons against Islam, Francis forbade his brothers to take part in these exercises. He demanded that his brothers be present first and foremost, living with and among the Saracens... Francis worked to prevent the brotherhood from being embroiled in the grasp for civil and ecclesiastical offices and power, and kept the community's focus on serving their neighbors for the glory of God only." (based on Francis and Islam by J. Hoeberichts (Franciscan Press, 1997).

The SACRED PRISMS retreat was a revelatory, transformational and unitive experience for me. To God was the glory, and as a Professed OEF member, so was my commitment to the gospels; "going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel."

I have pondered the shared thoughts of brother Coyote (Gary) Nahban, Katie Cook, John Murphy, Steve Jerbi, Helen Bathurst, Betty Lou Leaver, David Rensberger, Bruce Kay, Paula Clare, David Chasteen and more. I am 'blown away' by the diversity of our OEF collective religious experiences and background. I affirm with 'Yes!' our ability and courage to ask relevant questions that perhaps no other Christian group asks as publicly as we are doing; addressing differences, finding common

ground, pushing forward in servanthood to a climate changing, nuclear endangered, incredibly suffering world; would do Moses, Muhammed and Jesus proud of us all; yes!

Life in OEF was never meant to be comfortable; in mind or body or spirit. It is a life of spiritual journey, faithful obedience and Franciscan joy. Some who Professed into the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans may not embrace an Order of Interfaith Franciscans, as this is not what we initially 'signed on' to. We must explore the possibilities and move forward, as servants with Jesus, to be useful to the God of love. What is attempted would take untold hours of focus in the rough waters of these times. Yet, nothing is impossible with Francis and Clare as our witnesses and companions along the way.

With fear and courage, love and holy craziness, may we be both cautious and bold to take the hands of inter-faith believers and lead in a dance of "Yes!"

Dale Carmen, OEF





Words From The Servant Council



Dear OEF,

I am writing to inform The Order that I am no longer able to serve on the Servant Council for the remainder of my term. When I agreed to serving initially, I did not yet know what my future would be, but felt it important to be obedient to the call to serve.

Then, I was called to lead a church in Austin, TX. Balancing everything was a little more than I should have taken on, but I felt I needed to persist and continue to do my best to serve on the Council. Plus, I had really grown to love this ragamuffin lot! You really do bond with the rest of the Council and they are also a great support group.

But the reality of the role as Rector, a caretaker for my 84 year old mother who is blind, and then the sudden news that our landlord was selling the house we are in with very little time to vacate, pushed my responsibilities to more than I could manage. As much as I regret it, I am going to have to step back from the Council for the remaining months of my term.

Please keep the Council in your prayers. Every member has been through some tough times while we were together. Please support them and be understanding as they plan and prepare for Chapter/Convocation this summer.

In Peace and All Good Things,

Magdalena Stebbing

A hearty thanks to all the Novices who contributed to the Advent Reflections. It is one more way we can stay connected through prayer and shared devotion. We are grateful for their insights, grounding us in faith and community. Many blessings as they discern their profession to The OEF.

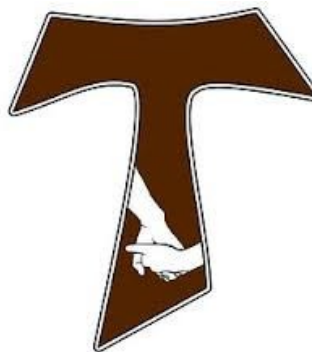
Magdalena and The Servant Council

The Servant Council would like to thank our OEF representatives for the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity. They now have a new representative coming on board as Ron Nuss-Warren transitions off. Please

welcome Faith Klein to the round table. We thank Ron and Caritas for their participation with the JCFU these last few years. They have been outstanding representatives in the efforts to build bridges among Franciscan Orders; finding the common ground and charisms that we all share in being followers of Francis and Clare. We are certain that Faith and Caritas will continue to be a blessing to the committee, bringing their gifts and talents to the others on the committee and all those to whom they share the common elements that bind Franciscans together. Our representatives are asking for just five members of The Order to take advantage of the opportunity to gather in person this coming March and share in this ecumenical experience. Please note the following invitation:

The following is offered by the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity. Please contact Ron Nuss-Warren if interested in attending.
Text or call: (308) 225-1489
email: rnwarren1@charter.net

The Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity, founded in 2004 by representatives of The Secular Franciscan Order USA, The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans and The Third Order Society of St. Francis (Province of the Americas) and expanded to include The Order of Lutheran Franciscans in 2017, is committed to working toward collaboration and visible unity among Christians who follow Jesus along the Simple Way of Francis and Clare as members of religious communities. To further that mission, the Joint Committee is inviting ecumenically-minded Franciscans into conversation and reflection on what the Committee has discerned to be "Elements of Franciscan Unity" at our next in-person Mini-Conference.



Words From The Servant Council... continued

This year's Mini-Conference is scheduled for **Friday, March 21 and Saturday, March 22. It will be held at the DoubleTree Aurora in Aurora, Colorado (east of Denver).** Over about twenty-four hours, the Joint Committee will present short presentations about each of the five Elements of Franciscan Unity, with ample time for discussion in both small and large group settings. We'll also join together in prayer, break bread together, and enjoy informal time for fellowship. Costs of registration (including lodging, Friday dinner, and Saturday breakfast and lunch) are covered by the Joint Committee. Participants are responsible for their own travel expenses. **The Mini-Conference is scheduled to run from 3pm Friday through 3pm Saturday**

***Please contact Ron Nuss-warren, OEF, if interested in attending:
Text or call: (308)225-1489
Email: rnwarren1@charter.net**

Please keep our current Council in prayer as we are focused on Chapter 2025. A gentle reminder that this is the year for a new Council term to begin. It's not too early to begin the prayerful discernment process. More information will be coming, but get those prayers started when you are lifting up this Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

Markie will be setting up registration again this year. Her recent correspondence indicated a registration period of April 15-May 23, give or take.



THOUGHTS ON COLONIALISM

Sibs,

As I was reflecting on our OEF Prelude this morning, I read and meditated on this line:

We acknowledge that Franciscans were central players in the oppressions and genocide of settler colonialism over the past several centuries.

True that, but deep acknowledgment requires detail; there is limited value in acknowledging vague generalities, however true. (Don't worry, Sibs. I'm not anticipating amendments to the OEF Statutes. I'm merely asking for conversation and reflection and prayer informed by some factual historical content.)

I am familiar with the Franciscan history with respect to the lands now known as the United States of America and for the lands currently held by nation-states south of the current US-Mexico border.

Surely, this involvement of Franciscans in settler colonialism is true for the lands north of the US as well, in so-called Canada. Who among us with Canadian ties can fill in any details here?

And what of other lands? For example, how did Franciscans participate in colonial oppressions in Aotearoa (and nearby Australia)? Are there any Franciscan colonial histories from Japan?

And for those among us living in European places, what are the histories of our Franciscan ancestors in faith engaging in colonial pursuits from those lands?

I would love to have my prayerful awareness of this inherited complicity (having professed vows within the Franciscan family in 2003) be better informed by snippets of history about the global spread of this phenomena. Can anyone share some details from a non-US context? Or at least point to good resources for understanding this subject in your local (non-US) contexts?

Thanks!

Pace e Bene`

Nancy Menning, OEF

This discussion began on the OEF Chat. Responses may be posted there



Lifelong Formation Station



We are always humbled and thankful for all of you who attended and shared in our services and/or share the connection with Franciscan minded friends and family. We are grateful to our visiting orders who share in our time together. Following the Advent service, Donna Hollis, OFS spent time sharing the realities that await and, by now, may be initiated with our immigrants and local shelters who care for immigrants. With so many storms brewing in this nation and around Mother Earth (and we're not just talking about weather) it would seem that we have and continue to enter into some kind of global darkness. This world and humankind has survived "darkness" time and time again. Brother Pacificus (in Japan) shared on Facebook that we are entering the year of the snake, leaving behind the year of the dragon. He also reminded us that "Yes, the snake is well known as a symbol of evil, danger, and deception. However, it's also a symbol of healing and rebirth (which is why it figures so prominently on the {Rod of Asclepius},* the emblem of doctors). The incoming year of the Snake is bound to bring more than its share of danger and evil; so may it also bring power and wisdom to slough off the bad and emerge ready to grow anew, stronger than before."

Brother Stephan inspires us to remember that darkness doesn't have to be a place to fear. We sleep and rest in darkness. It can be a place of reflection, healing and regeneration, a place that we will come forth triumphantly into the light. The following excerpt is taken from Every Moment Holy, *Volume II* in Douglas Kaine McKelvey's Liturgy for Grieving a National Tragedy (This can apply to all peoples, all nations, all tragedies):

*O God, who gathers what has been scattered,
Shelter us now in the shadow of your wings.
O Christ who binds our wounds,
Be our healer.*

*O Spirit who enters our every grief.
Intercede now for this hurting people,
in this broken land.
Be present in the midst of this
far-reaching pain, O Lord,
for we are reeling again,
at news of another loss of life
that touches us all;
news of flourishing diminished;
of individuals harmed;
of pain imposed,
not only upon victims and their families
who bear now the immediate brunt of it
- but also upon our nation.
For we are connected as a people,
and this hurt, this grief, touches us all.*

*Engage our imaginations
and move our hearts to compassion, O Lord,
that we would interact with these casualties,
not as news stories or statistics,
but as our own sisters and brothers,
flesh and blood, divine image-bearers,
irreplaceable individuals whose losses
will leave gaping holes in homes,
friendships, workplaces, churches,
organizations, and neighborhoods.*

*Be merciful to those now wounded,
Be present with those now bereaved.
You do not run from our brokenness, O God.
You move ever toward those in need.
Your heart is always inclined
toward those who suffer.*

*Now let your mercies be active
through the hands, the words,
and the compassionate care of those
who willingly enter this sadness
to console and serve.*

(Continued on page 7)

Lifelong Formation Station... continued

*Be with all who move toward this need:
The helpers, the counselors,
the first responders,
those who offer aid and protection,
the pastors and intercessors,
those who meet immediate practical needs,
those who seek to heal physical wounds,
and those who come after
to carry on the long, hard work
of rebuilding families and hearts
and lives and community.*

Grant each of them wisdom, courage,
vision, sympathy, and strength
to serve effectively in their
various capacities.

Even in the shadow of such tragedy,
let us not lose hope.
Give us eyes to see the rapid movements
of mercy rushing to fill these newly
wounded spaces.
Let us see in this the echoes of your own
mercy and compassion
- a foretaste of your kingdom
coming to earth.
And move our own hearts also,
equipping us to intercede,
to act, and to respond
however we are able.

Move, O Holy Spirit, in the midst
and in the aftermath of this tragedy,
in the wake of our wounding,
in the shock and the sorrow.

Arrest the hearts and stay the hands
of any who even now might be plotting
further evil and violence against others,

O Christ. Turn them from hatred.
Turn their hearts to you.
You once brooded over the formless chaos
of ancient waters and brought forth

the order and flourishing of creation.
Do so again, O Spirit of God.
From the chaos of this tragedy
call forth new life and order and flourishing.

Take even what our adversary might have
meant for evil, and from it bring forth
eternal good.

You alone have strength to carry
this people.
Carry us now, O Lord.
You alone have wisdom and power to heal
the wounds of a nation.
Heal us, O Lord.

You alone have compassion enough
to enter our widespread grief,
and turn it into Hope.
Be merciful, O Christ.
AMEN



OEF Zoom Lenten Service

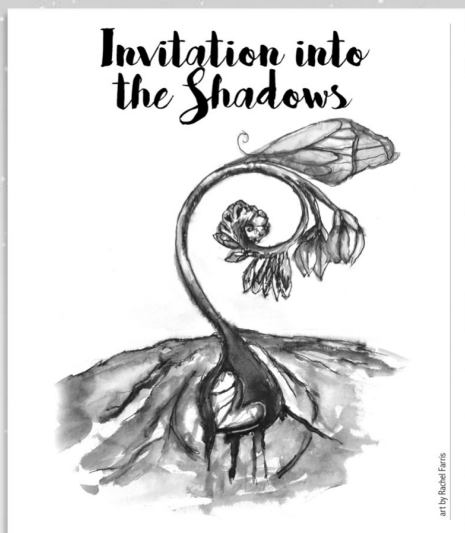
Good and Blessed day to all!

Below please take note of the Zoom link for the
OEF Zoom Lenten Service on March 8th at 3:00pm
CENTRAL TIME. In these uncertain and troubling
times let us draw together in prayer and reflection.
Yes, we do have to acknowledge the times that we
are in, but we also have to hold on to one another
and affirm our Faith, affirm our belief that our Crea-
tor, our Lord and Holy Spirit will hold us up, guide
us and give us strength and wisdom and grace to
journey forward.

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Lifelong Formation Station... continued

SAVE THE DATE
for the
OEF ZOOM LENTEN MEDITATION
SERVICE
MARCH 8, 2025
3:00pm CENTRAL TIME



The Lifelong Formation Team invites you all to this Lenten hour of prayer. Please feel free to share this invitation. We will share the Zoom link again when we get closer to the date, but try and note it on your calendars.

The Lifelong Formation Team is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: OEF Lenten Worship Service

Time: Mar 8, 2025 3:00pm CENTRAL TIME (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84153366603>
Meeting ID: 841 5336 6603

One tap mobile
+12532158782,,84153366603# US (Tacoma)
+12532050468,,84153366603# US

Dial by your location*

+1 253 8782 US (Tacoma)
• +1 253 205 468 US
• +1 669 444 9171 US
• +1 669 900 9128 US (San Jose)
• +1 719 359 458 0 US
• +1 346 248 7799 US (Houston)
• +1 309 205 3325 US
• +1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)
• +1 360 209 5623 US
• +1 386 347 5053 US
• +1 507 473 4847 US
• +1 564 217 2000 US
• +1 646 558 8656 US (New York)
• +1 646 931 3860 US
• +1 689 278 1000 US
• +1 301 715 8592 US (Washington DC)
• +1 305 224 1968 US

Meeting ID: 841 5336 6603

Find your local number:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84153366603>

Peace and Prayers Always-

Your OEF Lifelong Formation Team:

Stephan, Dale, Reg, Katie, Caritas, Deb



40 Days And 40 Writes for Lent

40 Days and 40 Writes - Lent Edition is back, open to all, and free. Sign up here:

<https://www.40days40writes.com/challenges>

If you haven't been to the 40 Writes web site in a while, you're in for a surprise. It took more than a year, but there's a whole new site that gives each person an individual dashboard to track their progress, a discussion forum for conversations, and a bunch of programs that anyone can start at any time. It has a blog database that can hold up to a half-million posts. Cue a deep public radio voice: *This was made possible by contributions from people like you. So come on over and check it out.*

Meanwhile, back in Los Angeles where I arrived just in time for the holidays/huge horrifying fires, I'm cooking up a few things. I've got a new fiction-writing program called "The Library Book," where the prompts are phrases and the challenge is to write them in a randomly selected genre. The small group who tried it in the fall seemed to have a blast, so I'm producing a start-anytime version. I'm also halfway through building a sequel to the popular 40-Day Memoir program. Both should be available by early spring.

Thanks for reading, and I hope some of you will join in for Lent or something else. I'll also try to get back in the habit of monthly updates.

Onward and upward!

— Robin Rauzi



- Shared on OEF Chat by Nancy Menning, OEF

OEF Online Bible Study

This is a recurring meeting every Thursday. Each week's Bible reading will be announced on the OEF-Chat.

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89760718708pwd=N2R0THcrWUpWSzlyM2N3eEdGdEF0QT09>

Meeting ID: 897 6071 8708 - Password - oef

7:30-8:30 PM ET,

6:30-7:30 PM CST,

5:30-6:30 PM MST

5:30-6:30 PM Arizona

4:30-5:30 PM PST,

7:30-8:30 PM Ecuador

1:30 pm -1:30 PM Friday in New Zealand

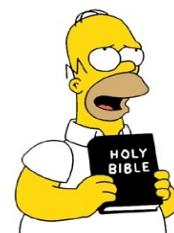
12:30 m -1:30 AM Friday in Ireland

9:30-10:30 AM Friday in Japan

You will need a computer or a smart phone with a headset (and a camera would be good) to participate. I will give a brief ZOOM tutorial as we meet, and I can help people before the meeting gets connected. We can talk on the phone as we work things out.

You are most welcome to join!

Br. Juniper, OEF



An Important Reminder

Reminder! Nancy Menning is the OEF Treasurer. Contributions can be made by sending a check to Nancy (made out to "Order of Ecumenical Franciscans") at:



**Order of Ecumenical Franciscans
c/o Nancy Menning, Treasurer
3175 Duke Snider Ave.**





Readers' Corner



Daniel Wolpert has a new book out:

<https://store.upperroom.org/product/looking-inward-living-outward>

Note that there is a "READ A SAMPLE" link near the end of the book description at that website, so you can make your own assessment. That said, from my quick glance, I can say that Wolpert describes twelve spiritual practices that connect action and contemplation. Some of us might find it helpful in reflecting on our spiritual practices (and our personal rules of life).

These are the twelve practices...

Practices that lay the groundwork for engaging in social transformation:

- Willful attention,
- Boundary creation,
- Fearless humility

Practices to transform relationships bounded by ego into relationships defined by love and compassion:

- Self awareness,
- Powerful presence, and
- Compassionate relationship

Practices to reform our relationship with material wealth and creating a just society:

- Serving God,
- Radical trust, and
- Letting go

Practices that directly engage our relationship to the world at large:

- Discernment,
- Loving your enemy, and
- The overarching practice of prayer.

Nancy Menning, OEF

Hello from Seaghán, n/OEF. I just received an e-galley of this book discussed below. I hope to share my deep dive into medievalist Andre Vauchez' 2014 study of F. following my critique of Augustine Thompson OP's similar investigation a couple of Fiddlers ago. (Michael Caputo, OFM has a recent if inevitably same title I haven't seen yet.) As for Volker Lappin, here's a scribe's sidelong glance. Choose your title. In print, it's "The Wild Charity of St. Francis." Online...

The Saint America Needs Now

Kindness has become countercultural. Perhaps Saint Francis can help.

James Parker, The Atlantic, February 2025.

It's a peculiar symptom of where we're at—caught between phases of consciousness, between the ruins of one world and the unknown shape of the next—to be seeing two things at the same time. Or to be seeing the same thing in two ways simultaneously. Stuck in the transition, we're condemned to a species of double vision: cross-eyed, as it were, in the cross-fade. And sometimes, sometimes, this can be quite useful. When you meet a guy, for example, like Francis of Assisi.

Genius or crackpot? Both. Sensuous embracer of life or self-mortifying freak? Both. Exhibitionist or recluse? Anarchist or company man? Runaway rich kid or true voice of the rejected? Both, both, and both. And when God spoke to him in 1206, his voice issuing from a crucifix and saying, "Francis, do you not see that my house is falling into ruin? Go, therefore, and repair the house,"

(Continued on page 9)

Readers' Corner... continued

did God mean the dilapidated, bat-flitted, holes-in-the-roof church in which Francis, at that moment, happened to be kneeling? Or did he mean the whole of medieval Christendom? He meant, of course—are you getting the idea?—both.

Volker Leppin's Francis of Assisi, newly translated from the German by Rhys S. Bezzant, is subtitled The Life of a Restless Saint, and the restlessness of the subject is shared by the author. His book, Leppin writes, "does not present itself as a biography in the classic sense." Which is not to suggest that Leppin, a professor of historical theology at Yale, has written some kind of jazzy meta-book. But Francis of Assisi does have double vision, maneuvering constantly between hagiography and history, legend and fact, heaven and Earth, miracles and—what's the opposite of miracles? Leppin comes not to debunk but rather to discover in what fashion those early, physics-defying accounts of Francis, the tales told within the blast radius of his actual presence, might be understood as true.

Francis was born around 1181, in Assisi in central Italy, the son of a well-to-do merchant named Pietro di Bernardone. After that, the story gets hazy. Some versions would have him quite a nicely behaved youth; in others, the more fun ones, he's a profligate, a sybarite, a tearaway. Seeking honors on the battlefield, he signs up for one of the endless local town-on-town skirmishes, only to be swiftly captured and imprisoned. When he gets out, a year or so later, the changes begin: conversion.

Francis tears off his fancy clothes; he kisses lepers; he starts begging. It's all a bit unbalanced. He turns his back on privilege and plunges madly downward. (Perhaps this is the point in the story at which Francis—were he trying something similar today, here in America—would find himself scooped up by psychiatry and institutionalized, or at the very least heavily medicated, at the behest of

his family maybe, or he'd go rattling unattended into the tunnels of the justice system.)

What he's doing is pretty straightforward. He's living—actually living—by the words of Jesus.

Desperate to impoverish himself, he tries to donate a large amount of his father's money to a local church; the priest, afraid of Bernardone Sr., refuses it, whereupon Francis—the anti-alchemist, King Midas in reverse, turning gold back to base metal—casts the money scornfully aside, "valuing it," as Saint Bonaventure wrote in his 13th-century *Life of Saint Francis*, "no more than dust that is trodden under foot."

But gradually, via great humiliations, a stint in a cave, and a complete rupture with his father, these lungings and impetuosities resolve themselves into the properly achieved Franciscan humor, a kind of continual outrageous sanctity. Francis becomes Francis, and he begins to attract followers. What he's doing is pretty straightforward. He's living—actually living—by the words of Jesus: Love your neighbor, give it all away, praise God, and don't worry about tomorrow. Pretty straightforward, and a head-on challenge to the world. It is no longer enough, for example, to give alms to the lepers and walk off feeling pious: Now, like Francis and his brothers, you have to accompany the lepers. You have to stand with them in what Leppin calls "the world of the excluded," of the lowest in society, which in the cosmic reversal effected by the Gospels turns out to be the highest place on Earth.

To get in touch with the miraculous Francis, the folkloric Francis, read the Fioretti, or The Little Flowers of St. Francis.

(Continued on page 12)

Readers' Corner... continued

a 14th-century collection of tales about the saint and his friars. It's a beautiful book. Here we find Francis "raising his face to heaven" like a solar panel, taming wolves and preaching to the birds and subsisting for weeks on half a loaf of bread to "cast the venom of vainglory from him." We see him healing a leper, and then, when that leper dies ("of another infirmity") a couple of weeks later, encountering the man's heaven-bound soul whooshing past him in a wood.

We see him—in a typically self-condemning mood, regarding himself as the vilest of sinners and the basest of men—earnestly instruct Brother Leo to tell him, "Truly thou dost merit the deepest hell." And Leo tries to say it—he tries his best—but when he opens his mouth, what comes bulbing out instead, Jim Carrey-style, is, "God will perform so many good works through thee that thou shalt go to paradise." Francis, peeved, renews the effort, enjoining Leo this time to tell him, "Verily thou art worthy of being numbered among the accursed." Again Leo assents, but the words that come through him, rebelliously, are, "O Friar Francis, God will do in such wise that among the blessed thou shalt be singularly blessed." And repeat. It has the rhythm of an SNL sketch. We also meet the amazing, more-Francis-than-Francis Brother Juniper, a figure of such affronting innocence that Francis himself, when he's wrangling a particularly tenacious demon, simply has to mention Juniper's name to make the demon flee.

G. K. Chesterton wrote very beautifully about Francis. For him, the saint's jangling polarities resolve themselves quite naturally if we imagine him as a lover: Francis was in love with God, so he did all the crazy zigzag things that lovers do. The feats, the ecstasies, the prostrations and abnegations. And he loved the

Church, too. "Francis," Leppin notes, "certainly did not engage in any polemic against the clergy." It never occurred to him to question directly the institutions and practices of Catholicism: The polemic, so to speak, was himself. The story goes that when he went to Rome to get Pope Innocent III's blessing, and Innocent said something waspish about him looking like a swineherd, Francis left the papal court, found a couple of pigs in the street, rolled around companionably in their pig-mess, and then came back.

Did that really happen? Does it matter? A story like that, we need it to be true. And right now we need Saint Francis. Now that kindness is countercultural, we need his extremes of wild charity to pull us back toward it. And we need his asceticism: His self-denial, his merry disdain of health and comfort and security, is a rebuke to our self-care. There are no safe spaces, and no guarantees—the only stability is the bottomlessness of divine love. The trapdoor held open by grace. So we take the hand of Francis, and down we go.



COMING TO A CITY NEAR YOU

Carol Penner

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
 Jesus comes to the gate, to the synagogue,
 to houses prepared for wedding parties,
 to the pools where people wait to be healed,
 to the temple where lambs are sold,
 to gardens, beautiful in the moonlight.
 He comes to the governor's palace.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you,
 to new subdivisions and trailer parks,
 to penthouses and basement apartments,
 to the factory, the hospital and the Cineplex,
 to the big box outlet centre and to churches,
 with the same old same old message,
 unchanged from the beginning of time.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you
 with his Good News and...
 Hope erupts! Joy springs forth!
 The very stones cry out,
 "Hosanna in the highest,
 blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"
 The crowds jostle and push,
 they can't get close enough!
 People running alongside flinging down their coats
 before him!
 Jesus, the parade marshal, waving, smiling.
 The paparazzi elbow for room,
 looking for that perfect picture for the headline,
 "The Man Who Would Be King."

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you
 and gets the red carpet treatment.
 Children waving real palm branches from the florist,
 silk palm branches from Wal-mart,
 palms made from green construction paper.
 Hosannas ringing in churches, chapels, cathedrals,
 in monasteries, basilicas and tent-meetings.
 King Jesus, honored in a thousand hymns
 in Canada, Cameroon, Calcutta and Canberra.



We LOVE this great big powerful capital K
 King Jesus coming in glory and splendor and
 majesty and awe and power and might.

Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
 Kingly, he takes a towel and washes feet.
 With majesty, he serves bread and wine.
 With honour, he prays all night.
 With power, he puts on chains.
 Jesus, King of all creation, appears in state
 in the eyes of the prisoner, the AIDS orphan,
 the crack addict,
 asking for one cup of cold water,
 one coat shared with someone who has none,
 one heart, yours, and a second mile.
 Jesus comes to Jerusalem, the city nearest you.
 Can you see him?





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****Articles for the Eastertide/Pentacost Issue are being accepted immediately. The deadline is May 15, 2025***

In Honor of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

On April 9, many churches remember Dietrich Bonhoeffer, martyred in 1945.

He wrote this prayer while in prison.

*O God, early in the morning I cry to You.
 Help me to pray
 and to concentrate my thoughts on You:*

*I cannot do this alone
 In me there is darkness,
 but with You there is light;*

*I am lonely,
 but You do not leave me;*

*I am feeble in heart,
 but with You there is help*

*I am restless,
 but with you there is peace.*

*In me there is bitterness,
 but with You there is patience;*

*I do not understand Your ways,
 but you know the way for me...*

*Restore me to liberty,
 and enable me to live now
 that I may answer before You and before me.*

*Lord, whatever this day may bring,
 Your name be praised.*

Amen.

Submitted by David Wirick, OEF

** URL for Angel Production's*

Bonhoeffer's biographical movie:

https://youtu.be/WZM90izJ8sI?si=Vr-9JAe_xlMxuBN_

