

Another spirituality

The spiritual movement which came began with Francis and his companions marks a revolutionary turn in the spiritual history of the church. No more stability but mobility. No more the closed world behind cloister walls but the world as a cloister, i.e. as a place of meeting God. Brotherly community and common wealth were the feature of the early Christian communities once. The missionary impulse arose from these communities.

That changed fundamentally when the Christianity became the state religion after the Constantinian turn, under Theodosius I in the 4th century. To be a Christian was no longer dangerous, but - on the contrary - the prerequisite to become someone important. This ease had mediocrity and superficiality as consequence. State and church became ever more similar. The emperor turned protector of the church and power the pope vied with him in the unfolding of power and pomp. People who wanted to live the original ideal founded therefore little communities to live after the example of the first dioceses, as Johannes Lassicus noted in the 4th century. It is the model of the old monastic communities with the supporting pillars of stability and common wealth.

That was not, Francis felt, what God had "revealed" to him. Not the well organised community was his example but Jesus himself. As Jesus, he wanted to go about in the world and announce like him the glad tidings of the coming of the kingdom of God to the poor. Who lets himself completely in for Jesus and his Gospel, becomes himself a missionary; he cannot live for himself any more but must be consumed for others. He was convinced of it. Therefore no longer private religiousness and worry for the spiritual salvation of one's own salvation, but dedication to the all-embracing shalom of God. Only the one who really has peace in his heart can make peace. one who really wants to announce to the poor the freeing message of Jesus credibly, has to be poor himself. One who wants to oblige himself completely for this message for the poor, mustn't commit himself to fixed places, but must be able to travel from place to place with light luggage. Mobility, poverty and non-violence are the characteristics of the

brotherhoods which correspond to this polar reversal of the Christian spirituality.

So the Franciscan charism always has a political dimension, too. Franciscans must stand for justice and truth; for a brotherly co-existence of all people in peace and liberty. They must fight against inequality, against hunger and poverty, against the abuse of mother earth and sister waters.

The presentation of church also changes. It must be a brotherly church if it wants to correspond to the Gospel. From the pope up to the simple layman, from the bishop up to lay people, everyone has the same dignity. They are the sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father, brothers and sisters of the Incarnate Son Jesus of Nazareth. They shall serve each other and wash the feet like him. There, there should no longer exist above and below, no more masters and servants. The logic of the power is no more valid; it should not exist in the church; on the contrary the dynamics of the love alone. And there the priority of the clerics over the laymen does not exist, nor that of men over the women.

II Vatican Council, which wished to open the church to the needs and requirements of the time, followed this trace. Mario von Galli, therefore, named St. Franz "the secret theme" of the Council". It is because it overcomes in its view the counter placement of hierarchy and the people of God, with a view of a church of the people God which is a messianic a community as a whole and the hierarchy as one in the many offices of service. " The mystery of the holy Church is manifest in its very foundation. The Lord Jesus set it on its course by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Kingdom of God, which, for centuries, had been promised in the Scriptures." (LG 5)

To all members of a church which is understood in this manner is to be afforded the dignity and the liberty the children's God in whose heart the holy spirit lives like in a temple. Francis recognised this and he lived it exemplarily, because he followed the footprints Jesus. That Clare had the same inspiration at the same time and at the same place only shows as to how much God has in His plan to make alive and experienceable the freeing message of the kingdom of God in His church again.

Andreas Müller OFM

The laymen, the Franciscans and the II Vatican Council

Dr. Mario Cayota OFS

Dr. Mario Cayota was born in Uruguay in 1936, and he belongs to the Franciscan world order. He is director of the Franciscan centre for historical documentation, and was president of the Christian Democratic party and president of the state parliament. He is also professor of philosophy and history at national and international universities, and author of several books for the Franciscan story in Latin America. From 2006 - 2011 he was ambassador of Uruguay at the Vatican.



The Franciscan spirituality is not only related to the theological and pastoral positions which were developed in the II Vatican council, but it is full harmony with them. As is well known, the Franciscans were a lay movement at the beginning. The members of the Franciscan movement orientated themselves in their way of life at the example of the worldly penitents. There were no priests among them, they had neither monasteries nor friaries, there was no cloisters, they dressed in the way of the penitents. They did not wear the habit of monks, and they were also different in their way of praying and preaching. They were different in their way of life from the monks and the normal representatives of the church; also from the priests of the secular clergy. The obviously laicistic profile of Francis would become a problem for the Roman curia, and thereby without his assistance they made him a "tonsure bearer" or "deacon", although some historians doubt about it.

Not even after the admission of Antony of Padua (actually of Lisbon) as well as the general admission of priests are the special features abolished. Thus for example, there were no hierarchical differences between the priests and the non-ordained members in the beginnings. Everyone had the same rights even in the chapter.

Even when the clericalising in the First Order made its progress, the lay component was still strong in the Order, for the members of the Third Order formed an essential part of the Franciscan Order. Therefore if the origins of the Third Order is examined, it come clearly to light what great value and place the lay people have regarding the following of Jesus and the development of the Church. New research show that the Third Order originated from the powerful and numerically strong lay beggar movements of the Middle Ages; these go so far that it is hardly possible to distinguish between the roots of the two. Perhaps one of the few clear identity-features is their loyalty to the Roman church.

The Franciscan movement is in harmony with the lay nation-wide movements with their worries, with their desire for reform; the strength of these movements were very strong. Much of it was even appreciated by the church. Some of them are even exemplarily mentioned: In the year 1201 Innocent III confers recognition to the Third order of the Minors; in the year 1208 to the poor Catholics, within the years 1210 and 1212 to the poor of Lombardy, and so on.

In 1201 the "Propositum" for the Minors was abrogated; but in the year 1221 the recognition of a still further developed statute already follows with the name "Memoriale del Propositum dei Fratelli e delle Sorelle Della Penitenza, residente nelle loro case," (=rule of the sisters and brothers of the penitence movement). At the same time Francis combined forces with innumerable lay people, primarily married, who dedicated themselves to penitence and the service to the Lord.

This way the Third Order came into being. The rules to which the members orientated their lives until the time of pope Nikolaus IV (1289) are written down in the "Memoriale". Examinations confirm that the new rule of pope Nikolaus IV contains many elements which go back to the "Memoriale". It is to be remembered here that this set of rules was valid until pope Leo XIII in 1883 announces a follow-up work. The close connections with the great lay movements of the Middle Ages – even the "TAU" symbol which was used by some of these movements was taken over – show the ability of the Franciscan movement to feel with the reform and renewal wishes of the time. II Vatican Council, with the document "Gaudium et Spes", made it clear that such a sensibility is necessary.

It is also known that the place of the laity which is due to them in the church was not always awarded to them. In the course of the history, there have always been single personalities among lay people who played a particularly excellent role in the church. For example, Kardinal Contarini, member of the humanistic Christian movement of the XVI century, or Kardinal Antonelli, who functioned as state secretary of Pius IX.

Pope Leo XIII assigned an important task to the Franciscan Third Order in the reorganisation of the society; this is thanks probably to the influence of the social behaviour of Franciscan laymen as important as Federico Ozarán and León Harmel. But only the II Vatican Council will rediscover the layman and recognize more deeply and give a positive definition as a member of the people God, assign his true place to him and recognize his genuine vocation and his rights.

In chapter 2 of the constitution "Lumen Gentium" in which it deals with the " people of God" an important step is already taken, when it is called under number 10: "Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated: each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ". The following number presents the consequences of this position. In chapter IV of this constitution, which is dedicated to the laymen, and which is alone already highly remarkable, the usual negative definition of the layman is renounced (layman is who has not received the sacred consecrations), and offers a positive definition of the layman as a member of the people of God. Thereby the document ascribes a specific vocation to the laymen which he alone can fulfil due to his quality as baptized in the church, and as the one in the structures of the secular world. As recognized in the old Franciscan documents, the Council recognizes in the chapter over the laymen under number 37 the right, and in some cases the duty, of laymen to make their point of view known regarding the matters of the welfare of the church. It is there, said "the ordained priests shall appreciate and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laymen in the church".

The Vatican council underlines, that the secular character is part of the laymen and it is characteristic of them; that the laymen is entitled from his own being to live the kingdom of God in our time and to deal with and put in order questions of the time. In chapter III of the Council document "Gaudium et Spes" which deals with the economic and social aspects of life, clear pastoral guidelines are contained as to how this task of the laymen can be realized. So too in the Franciscan spirituality considerable concern is expressed in texts regarding the excluded and for the poor. The laymen are exhorted to support with persistence for social equity.

Some well-known historians of the Franciscan movement hold the opinion that Francis and the first pupils had little interest for the social conditions of their time and their motives and aims have been in purely spiritual type. They argue that their poverty, for example, is to be ascribed to only purely "asceticism", an "inner emptying". In all the texts a renunciation of material goods is an unavoidable condition for the admission into the Order and the goods or the money obtained from their sale is given to the poor. It shall be given neither to relatives or friends and not even to the church. One does not renounce simply either to achieve a certain purpose but explains that the money has to be given to the poor. The "spiritual emptying" is all about inner liberty and the following of Jesus; but it is always taken in connection with the social situation of the neighbour. It goes on still further: When a brother opposes that Francis gives to a poor man his blanket, the saint answers that it would be robbery if one would not give it away. In connection with this, the attention and welfare of Francis for the leprous, the really excluded, are also a very clear testimonial [...]

(The whole article in German: <http://www.ccfmc.net/images/0812cayota.pdf>)