Franciscanism and Organizational Identity:
Toward A Community of Fraternal Empowerment

David B. Couturier, OFM. Cap.

Introduction

It is not often that an institution gets to restructure, reorganize and re-do its organizational identity.[1] Indeed, it is something quite rare. More often than not, our organizational identities, who we are as a group, what we are about as a community and how we are perceived as a fraternity are set before us and inherited by us in law, in custom and in culture. We enter Provinces already established. We join fraternities already designed. All that we usually get to do, when we come together at chapters and assemblies, is update and refresh what we are about and we do so with modified strategies, adapted priorities, and improved action plans. We build on what has already been constructed. When we meet in Chapter, therefore, our usual task is relatively simple and straightforward. We come together to adjust who we are, to modify what we do, to read the signs of the times in which we live in order to adapt our ministries more closely to the charism to which we have been called. The task of the Chapter is thereby fundamentally one of realignment and re-adjustment.

That is not the moment that now calls you. As I understand it, you are at a unique moment of creativity and fraternal empowerment. It is one of restructuring, reordering, and reorganizing. Indeed, it is a moment of profound renewal and refounding.[2] You are not simply adapting what was and modifying what has been. You are being called to hear in your midst the voice of the One who has said in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, "Behold, I am doing something new!" (Isaiah 43:9)

Up until now, you have been organized as separate and distinct provinces. You have received your organizational identity from the friars who once founded and built your Provinces. Up until now, you entered different provinces and developed your group identity within separate canonical structures, in various locales, with different ministries, particular projects, and according to specific customs and ways of engaging life, ministry and relationships. Obviously, you are not aliens from different planets. You have much in common as OFM friars. You have the Rule of St. Francis in common. You both enjoy the same Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor. Yet, we need to tell the truth - provinces are unique organizational entities and distinguishable institutional cultures, with distinct institutional beliefs, emotions, rituals and resources, that allow provinces to have a flavor, climate and mood all their own. For that reason, what you are undertaking is an exciting moment of substantive change that comes with its own challenges, anxieties and trepidations!

The anxiety is not just personal; it is communal. It is not just individual; it is structural. The reason is straightforward - the social identity around which you have organized and understood yourselves, as this Province or that Province, as this community or that community, is in a state of transition and reformulation.

---

[1] For an understanding of the term "organizational identity," cf. S. Albert and D.A. Whetten, "Organizational Identity" in L.L. Cummings and M.M. Staw (eds.), *Research in Organizational Behavior* 7 (1985), 263-295 and David A. Whetten, "Albert and Whetten Revisited: Strengthening the Concept of Organizational Identity," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 15:3 (September 2006), 219-234.

[2] For a most recent conceptualization of the task of refounding, cf. Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Religious Life in the 21st Century: The Prospect of Refounding* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016).

It is being renewed and, when undertaken, you will have to understand yourselves as a group in a new way. You will have to conduct yourselves in a new mode and be seen and understood, accepted and engaged in a very different manner.

Of course, you can skip all this and imagine that what you are doing is simply a legal modification and a canonical adjustment. You can fantasize that all of this work is simply a change in mailing addresses, where insurance forms go and from whence provincial communications derive. Treating this moment only as a legal fiction would be to miss the opportunity rarely given to redefine and reposition yourselves in a time, I would argue, that begs for religious renewal. I think your Minister General understands this quite well. He has steered you in the direction of "renewal" rather than simply "restructuring."

I fully understand and respect that some who are promoting a new Franciscan union in Canada might want to dampen down talk of differences and may want to speak only of all that is held in common. From one point of view, that makes eminent sense. I also understand and respect that those who are reluctant about union at this time may want to emphasize the real differences that exist between the Provinces and the dissimilarities that abound between various communities and regions across this great land. However, neither commonalities nor differences should be exaggerated. From an organizational point of view, neither one should overtake the other. A union of two groups always involves elements of similarity and aspects of differentiation. Whenever a new entity is formed and different people join together for a common purpose, both components need to be acknowledged and respected. No one should exploit similarities or differences, as it is easy to do, because of the anxiety of the moment and neither one should be misused in a way that obscures the real and exciting opportunity you have before you.

What lies in front of you is the enviable chance to create a new and vibrant organizational identity for the church in Canada. You have the opportunity to define, understand, engage and express yourselves as a fraternity in an entirely new way, something that generations of brothers were never able to do because their organizational identity was already set in law and cast by historical precedent in a particular shape.

I want to spend my time during this first presentation encouraging you to understand and appreciate the task of creating this new organizational identity together in a way that provokes passion and hope in what lies before you.

Organizational Identity

I have been speaking of *organizational identity* as if it were something clear and immediate in our minds and hearts.[3] It is not. It is something always in the background of who we are when we belong to a group. *Organizational identity* is a phrase that answers the question, "who are we as a group, who are we as a fraternity?" Organizational identity consists of three inter-related elements. First, there is *purpose* ("Why do we exist and why are we here?") Purpose speaks to our understanding of our mission as a fraternity and the vision that guides what we do and how we live as a group. We are not speaking here of one's personal sense of mission or one's individual understanding of task. That goes to issues of personal identity. We are speaking of our *shared* belief and our *common* understanding of why we are here and what we are attempting to accomplish in the world. We are speaking of the province's motivation and the fraternity's underlying purpose. A fraternity's purpose is a bold affirmation of our reason for being as a religious group

[3] Johan van Rekom and Cees B.M. van Riel, "Operational Measures of Organizational Identity: A Review of Existing Methods," in *Corporate Reputation Review* 3:4 (2000), 334-350.

from a historical, ethical, emotional, and practical perspective.[4] In our highly individualistic times, with its emphasis on and even exaggerations around personal freedom and autonomy, we often skip over these much-needed conversations about provincial purpose to return to meditations on "what I want to do" and "what I am called to be." Organizational identity's first element, however, asks about the province's central, distinctive and enduring purpose.[5]

The second element of *organizational identity* is *brand.* Our brand answers the question, "How are we known to the world?" This is the fraternity's way of communicating "who we are" and "what we promise" to those we presently serve, those we would like to serve, current and future employees, bishops, laity and other religious. It is our unique and distinctive formulation of what we are actually promising to be and do, which distinguishes us from others, and which makes us worthy of people's support. It is the fraternity's promise to the People of God at a specific time, in a specific locale, about what we intend to do and deliver for the sake of the Gospel.

The third element of *organizational identity* is *culture.* Culture answers the question, "How do we live and how do we do things around here?" Culture is the amalgam of our day-to-day institutional beliefs, emotions, rituals and resources that lets us and others know how we actually operate in the day-to-day living out of our religious life. It is our performative road map. If purpose speaks to our *ideal* or *aspirational self* as a community of brothers, culture reveals our *actual selves*, the way we actually perform our mission and vision in the daily traffic of our lives.[6]

Laying out these definitions of purpose, brand and culture now allows us to consider three critical questions that face you in the renewal and reconstruction of your organizational identity:

1. What will be your purpose as a new province? How will you answer the question as to why you exist and why are you here? Who are you now and what are you presently set up to be? Is this who you deeply want to be as a fraternity?

2. What will be your brand in the world? How do you want to be known as a fraternity? What do you want to promise others to be in the commerce of your relationships and exchanges as a community in the Franciscan movement?

3. How do you actually want to act as a new group in the Church? What are the ground rules and guidelines that will articulate how you want to do things around here? This moment allows graced space for changes in your performance as a group.

Franciscan Organizational Identity: Developing Purpose

Fortunately a new fraternity's organizational identity is not created *ex nihilo* or out of thin air. We have a pattern, a *forma minorum,* out of which we create our individual social entities. We inherit a movement

[4] Cf. "Gallup's Perspective on Organizational Identity," (Gallup, Inc, 2014) accessed at: www.gallup.com/services/ 178031/ gallup-perspective-organizational-identity-pdf.aspx

[5] Albert and Whetten, op. cit.; Zannie Giraud Voss, Daniel M. Cable and Glenn B. Voss, "Organizational Identity and Firm Performance: What Happens When Leaders Disagree about 'Who are We?' *Organization Science* 17:6 (2006), 741-755.

[6] For the distinction between our ideal self and our actual self, cf. David B. Couturier, *The Four Conversions: A Spirituality of Transformation* 2nd edition (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2017), 33-60.

from the early workers who once stood by the poorest and most vulnerable of Assisi and re-thought, re-cast, and reformed the social imagination of their day.[7] These were the men who gathered around Francis and the women who stood with Clare and reconceived the economic structures and social systems of their day, refusing to be controlled by the embedded social imagination of greed and violence they had inherited, but instead repositioned themselves in a new ethical space for life, for work and for all social exchanges.[8] These women and men did not join a religious order to cordon off life from work, prayer from labor, economics from spirituality. They joined a movement that seemed to them to be like a *novus ordo saeculorum* that would finally free them from the convulsions of commodified living and allow them finally to experience freedom through the paradoxical and intentional security of poverty, *sine proprio.*[9]

But, let us pull back and understand our originating purpose once again, skimming off the layer upon layer of pious barnacles that have attached themselves to our Franciscan communal identity. To do so, I need to take you back to a moment that changed a young man's history and sparked a social revolution that reverberates to this day. It is the moment when a young man in his twenties stands naked in the public square and squares off with his father, his church and his culture.

When Francis stood naked in the public square of Assisi and handed back his clothes to his father, he was doing more than having a young man's spat with an authoritarian father. He was proclaiming before the world something much more profound. He was declaring that he wanted off the social grid and release from his familial, social, political and civic obligations. He wanted out because he had come to believe that the social grid was constructed on what we might call an "economics of extraction," a social ordering that put the vulnerable at the service of the privileged and the poor under the unbearable demands of the powerful, thereby damning society to endless spasms of violence in the service of greed. It was a broad swipe at the social and religious culture of his day.

What stands behind this symbolic gesture is the embedded social imagination that controlled the political and religious imagination of the times in which Francis of Assisi lived. An "embedded social imagination" is the implicit narrative of a culture of how things are the way they are in the culture and why they must be so. An embedded social imagination is the "horizon of expectations" that tell people what they can hope for and anticipate from the world in which they live. The embedded social imagination of Francis' time revolves around greed and violence, untested assumptions that the world must be constantly roiled by ravenous lust for power and privilege.

What the naked figure in the public square is challenging is so much more than his father's authoritarian ways and his greedy business practices. Francis has entered the piazza to indict the whole social script by which his generation has lived its life.

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) grew up by a narrative of incredible violence and enormous greed. He was the son of a wealthy cloth merchant, an apparently happy and well-provided for young man used to the high-life and fast lane adolescence of an up and coming new generation of financial entrepreneurs. Whether working in his father's clothing shop or gathering his friends for parties for which he paid, he was, as a

[7] David Flood, OFM, *Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Movement* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2017).
[8] On the foundations of new Franciscan "ethical spaces," cf. Joseph P. Chinnici, *When Values Collide: The Catholic Church, Sexual Abuse and the Challenges of Leadership* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010).
[9] David Flood, *The Daily Labor of the Early Franciscans* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2010).

young man, always the walking advertisement for his father's fashion business. He not only accompanied his father on his business trips to France for the finest cloth, he modeled what was purchased and he advertised what was being sold.

However, Francis was more than a model. He was more than a symbol to his family. He was his father's promise of a change in the family's economic fortune, one that held out hope that the family could become part of a noble class of living to which the Bernardone family was not born. Francis and his father had a deeper motive for Francis' actions and a large scheme for his adventures with the young nobles with whom he hung around. Francis and his father were trying to legitimize a new kind of economy based on hard work and merit not inheritance, as was the way wealth worked in medieval times. The adolescent Francis and his father were committed to a new social ideal whereby families could work their way into the benefits of the upper class and actually create status for those not born into privilege.

Francis' father had often shared with his son that he was tired of slogging his way back and forth to France to pursue his business, only to be interrupted and gouged by the endless tariffs and tollbooths erected by noble families that kept the noble class and no others in the privileged lifestyles to which they had become accustomed. Francis' father was intent on building a new and indeed radical model whereby people made money a new-fashioned way: they would earn it. Families, in the economic model that the Bernardones were constructing, would assume the social rewards of privilege and receive the accolades of the upper class because they had earned their way into a new kind of *entrepreneurial nobility*. It was a radical and dangerous ideal that Francis and his father, Pietro, promoted for the times in which they lived.

Francis and his father were trying to reshape not simply the economic order of things, but the social one as well. Francis, the adolescent singer of French ballads, had high ambitions of redrawing the social hierarchical map so that it would include families like his own, hard-working people who thought they deserved the privileges and the respect now reserved to those who did nothing more than simply "inherit" what they had. Francis and his father were committed to "working their way up" the ladder of nobility's privileges, if not its peerage.

However, the medieval world knew almost nothing of "upward mobility," as we now know and suppose it. The "majores" of Francis' day did not share the logic of inclusiveness that Francis was forming in his mind. The majores liked the hierarchical arrangement as it was, dividing the world between the haves and the have nots. It suited their needs just fine. The world, as they knew and wanted it, was designed for a hierarchy of the few *above* the many. That is the way the world worked, they thought, and the nobility, which included both laity and clergy, were willing to fight to maintain the status quo.

The tensions that developed in the 12th and 13th centuries around these questions of access and merit, privilege and power were extremely dangerous and often turned deadly. The time of Francis was one of constant wars and incessant bloody battles. Violence in the service of greed was the norm and expectation of Francis' time and culture. It was the "new normal" of his time. The young adult Francis not only expected this connection between violence and greed, he welcomed it as the only means of securing the "justice" he envisioned for himself, his family and his town. Francis accepted his society's brutal economic narrative and was quite willing to play his dangerous part in it. Because of that and for that, he decided to go to war.

Francis' adolescent dreams were as vast as they were naïve. Few young men take stock of the bloody consequences of real wars before they go off to battle. They wallow only in their fantasies of war to excite and inspire them; they rarely take note of the actual consequences. This seems true of Francis. To Francis

the plan was simple enough. He would become a knight and finally achieve the glory he and his family were owed. Francis would go to war and return home a hero to the public accolades and rich rewards of the noble class. To that end, his father outfitted him masterfully for war. Francis, the playful darling of his friends, set out for combat with nothing more than glory on his mind.

However, something happened to Francis at the Battle of Collestrada, something that shook him to the core of his soul. Taken prisoner of war, he languished in prison for the better part of a year until ransomed by his father. Whatever happened to him and the actual historical record here is thin, it shattered him. Francis was never the same after his experience of war.

Like many soldiers before and after him, Francis had finally seen the real consequences of war. He had seen his friends, the ones he used to party with as minstrels on the streets of Assisi, now butchered on the bloody floor of the Umbrian and Spoleto Valleys. Francis stood shaken and traumatized by what he had experienced. He had no way of making sense of what had happened to him and his friends out there where blood saturates dreams and swords tear through a young man's heart. The experience was so traumatizing that Francis could hardly find words for what occurred. It was devastating enough that Francis would never pick up a sword or advocate for violence again. Coming home, Francis tried to reorder his priorities and rework his life plans. His questions went further and became more radical. They went to the core of his identity as a man, as a son, and as a Christian. He asked himself, "Chi sei tu, Signore, and chi sono io?" (Who are you, Lord, and who am I?)

Francis would look first for his individual purpose and then soon arrive at a new organizational identity. During this process, Francis repeatedly questioned the roots of the violence and greed that had consumed his adolescent imagination. In the caves and lonely haunts surrounding Assisi, he understood that his questions were not simply about himself. They were about his society and, more frighteningly, they were about his God. He understood what many had missed in their justifications for violence in the name of privilege, that God was being implicated by Assisi's association of God with the greed of the day.

God and the Franciscan Organizational Identity

Francis' night sweats were not simply about his memories in battle and his illness as a prisoner of war. He trembled at what was happening to his soul in front of his adolescent God who could no longer inspire or direct him. The God of his youth had been left out on the battlefield with the corpses of his friends and fellow soldiers, the ones with whom he had shared his adolescent passions.

Francis had grown up on the apocalyptic and majestic images of God that were current in the Middle Ages. It was common belief that God looked after the world but on a throne and with a threatening glance and a thunderous judgment against evil. As a boy, Francis would have shaken with dread as he pondered the imperial character of the Almighty. Yet, something changed in his view of God after his experience of war. His turning toward the poor and his turning against the violence that saturated his time-period implicated his view of God, as well. That is to say, his well-chronicled conversion included not just sensitivity to the vulnerable and a wondrous appreciation for the lowliest of creatures in nature. It also now impelled Francis to a dramatic and radical love of the humble God, the naked divinity, and the approachable incarnate Christ of the Gospels, the One whose fundamental stance turned out to be mercy and compassion, and not angry judgment and a vengeful wrath.

Francis came to the conviction that it was this tender and kind God that violence and economic greed obscured and defaced. As this realization crystallized in him, it became Francis' mission to reveal once again the goodness and indeed the humility of God, found in abundance in the lowliest and most vulnerable of creatures.

Francis embarked on a new purpose and mission – to see and experience the world in the fullness of a God who was good, all good, supremely good, all the time and to everyone. He discovered the remarkable principle that the way to experience the fullness of God was through a process of emptiness. That is, the way to enter the majesty of God was through experiences of minority. In order to experience the abundance of a good and gracious God, Francis had to open up new spaces emptied out of self-aggrandizement and competitive aggression. He had to find his way to the luxurious nature of God's kindness through the portals of vulnerability. He could no longer live by Assisi's "horizon of expectations." He had to create a new way of living.

His contemporaries had proposed that the way towards God was through an imitation of majesty and the accumulation of power, prestige, and privilege. Francis had learned just the opposite. The way to fullness was by emptiness. This insight would have enormous impact for the way the brothers used money and the way they went about their economic activities in the world.

The Fraternal Economy

With Francis, the brothers created a fraternal economy in sharp contrast to the competitive and aggressive economy of his time. They premised their fraternal economy on the belief that God was ever generous and abundant in gifts to humanity and in creation. The fraternal economy did not divide the world into those who have and those who have not, as their medieval economy had done. Their more social economy was not staged on the presupposition that some were destined to privilege and others were fated to deprivation. Their medieval economy, founded on aggression and greed, fostered chronic social insecurity. The rituals and rules of the fraternal economy, on the other hand, protected their security with one another and their reliance on one another. Francis did not design poverty to increase insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty among the brothers. Quite the opposite! Franciscan poverty was the protection of fraternity by setting the means by which friars relied and depended on one another for all they had and all they received from a good and generous God. Francis' critical understanding of poverty was less about ascetics than it was about the development of mutuality, relationality, and interdependence not only with one another but with the entire creation under God.

Thus, Franciscan poverty could not mean the denigration or rejection of the world. Francis' view of poverty connected the brothers intimately to God's abundant and lush world and to all God's creatures. The brothers did not embark on poverty to castigate, depress or escape from the creatures of this world. The brothers did not want to bypass the natural world in order to "get to heaven" as quickly as possible. Quite the opposite! The brothers wanted to enjoy the lavish goodness of God found in God's good creation.

Francis' re-thinking of the economics of his time, concentrated as it was on the development of his fraternity's use of goods and money, was aimed at the construction of security, joy, and peaceful relations, elements of life sorely lacking in the culture of his time. Francis' rule was anticipating Christ's return to "create a new heavens and a new earth," by living in the simplicity of life that called on the brothers and sisters to live in communion and not in competition with one another. Francis wanted his fraternity to experience the fullness of God, not God's supposed stinginess or vengeance. Francis created an economic

model and plan of life that re-directed the brothers and sisters away from aggression and power building and toward mutual reliance and common sharing.

Francis' Path to Organizational Purpose: Towards an Economics of Inclusion

When he kissed the leper on the roadside, he began to construct a new ethic and spirituality of inclusion. He no longer wanted to participate in a society that divided itself between the *majores*, the privileged few, over the *minores*, the destitute and deprived many. He no longer wanted to protect this brutal arrangement of economic and spiritual exclusion with the weapons of war and the force of law. He retreated from the social boundaries of his culture, and he cast his lot and his future with the rejected, serving lepers in the crude hospices, deep within the forests of the Umbrian Valley. Interestingly, Francis' conversion took place within the confines of Assisi's health care crisis, over his society's civic obligations and commitment to the sick poor. Francis would have stayed nothing more than a solitary charitable but unknown figure in history, if it were not for another conversion beyond his embrace of the leper. Francis tells us of his second conversion. He calls it the one "when the Lord gave me brothers" (Testament).

Soon enough young men (and eventually young women) came to embrace his radical life form off the social grid, away from the normative greed and violence of the day. Because of this, Francis realized that God was calling him to create a new way of life, a new social experiment called "fraternity."

The radical nature of "fraternity" has lost some of its currency over the generations. We have worn out fraternity's original radicalism by reducing it to some social form of camaraderie or canonical/legal association with one another. Even in the church and its canonical codes, we have allowed fraternity to be obscured or domesticated by terms such as "common life" or "community living." We need to re-enliven the concept and return it to its original force and radical meaning.

In developing "fraternity," Francis was creating a new organizational identity for the men and women who joined his movement and way of life. He was creating a new sense of social purpose by re-arranging relationships in a radical way, outside the social grid of violence and greed in which they had been formed. Francis rejected the hierarchical separations of his forbears. He renounced the economic levels of his contemporaries. Francis refused to see the women and men through the optics of an uneven economic differentiation or begin relationships with the presumption of superiority and inferiority as his era's social customs required. Instead, he counseled his brothers to greet every person with the presumption of equality with the moniker of "Peace and all good!"

The new form of life that Francis was creating would have no superiors, only servants. There would be no divisions whatsoever. There would be no trace of majores and minores. There would be no differentiation between those who have and those who do not. His world would not be segmented by those who were privileged and those who were impoverished. Their lifestyle would be characterized by an attitude of radical humility, hospitality, and a determination to stop scratching for position and power and an intention to take the last place in everything. Free from a fatal possessiveness, the brothers and sisters could be appreciative of all that God gives freely and abundantly.

What Francis began to construct was an economy of inclusion. The brothers and sisters would no longer abide by an economy of extraction that took the time, treasure and talents of the poor and vulnerable and delivered them for the exclusive privilege of the powerful. The brothers and sisters would withdraw from the massive social, cultural, religious and psychological insecurity that this extraction fostered. Instead,

their poverty would create a paradoxical security because their fraternity, formed by mercy and forgiveness, ensured dialogue, participation, mutual care and a spirit of communal reliance.

People have grossly misunderstood Francis of Assisi by characterizing his spirituality as a "love of poverty." Poverty was not Francis' main objective, at least not as commonly understood. Francis was not obsessed over "things." Francis did not focus on self-denial for its own sake. Francis surely practiced ascetics but not as an end in themselves. Community was more at the center of his consciousness. Francis was interested in the common good, the social bond, the experience of love, and the ability to include everyone in the embrace of a God that Francis came to recognize as absolute self-diffusive love.

Francis wanted the community to experience the divine abundance as purely and as directly as possible, without interruption or confusion. The way to protect this experience of shared divine abundance was through an attitude of dispossession. In Latin, we call this "sine proprio," living without owning anything of one's own. Francis rallied his fraternity around a radical disposition against possessing anything or anyone. Francis' logic was as simple as it was direct. If we own, we must protect. If we protect, we must guard the things we own to the point of violence, and it was violence that Francis rejected most of all.

Francis had seen too much violence in his youth. He had seen how far the citizens of Assisi would go to protect the wealth of the privileged few. They would send their sons to war and their children to death in the bloody fields of the Umbrian and Spoleto Valleys. He knew this because he had witnessed the butchering of the friends he loved and the friends he used to party with, when he was the happy-go-lucky minstrel on the streets of Assisi.

Let us now return to our originating question. Based on our *forma minorum,* our movement and way of life, how can we construct a renewed and refounded organizational identity today? What are the elements of a Franciscan organizational identity that can provide passion and hope, not just in us but also within the Church in Canada?

The Elements of a Purposeful Franciscan Organizational Identity

We are looking for the elements of an organizational identity that can answer the questions – what is our purpose as a new province, why are we here, why do we exist and what kind of fraternity do we want to be?

These are questions only you can answer for yourselves. What I can offer now are some elements from the treasures of our Franciscan imagination that might guide and inspire you. These elements can be used in your discussions about how you wish to understand your meaning, mission and purpose.

In the background of these identity questions must be a deeper and sober group meditation on the embedded social imagination of our times. Just as Francis confronted the violence and greed of his times, so must we address the normative and tragic patterns of our own thinking, especially the ones that are so deeply ingrained, expected and normal that we hardly question them at all, despite their increasing danger to our emotional, social, cultural and religious health.

I can do no better than to advise you to take up the amazing work of your own French-Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, in his masterful tome, *A Secular Age.*[10] No one has interpreted better the underlying convictions, commitments, compulsions and convulsions of our time. He has identified our idolatries with masterful precision. It would take a whole course of studies to do justice to his central thesis -- that we are all living by our own unique and now global spasms of greed and violence without metaphysical cushion or ontological relief. This is so because we have chosen to make God optional in our secular age. We have decided to throw aside more than two thousand years of tasking civilization with a spirituality of transcendence and replace it with a post-modern spirituality of self-actualization. This is what the Old Testament scholar Walter Bruggemann calls our ethic of "self-invention for self-sufficiency." [11]

Our organizational identity as Franciscans cannot be configured to self-invention or self-sufficiency. Our organizational identity revolves around fraternity and the development wherever we are of "free communions of persons without domination or deprivation."[12] I firmly believe that fraternity, a Gospel-consciousness of brotherhood and sisterhood, is the palliative our secular age needs to confront our spasms of injustice and inequality. Let me list a few of the elements I can see being part of a renewed Franciscan organizational identity.

Inclusion

Francis of Assisi believed in community and was fiercely egalitarian. The social structures of his youth were severely and brutally divided. People were assigned their social standing and their economic space by the cultural customs and conventions of the time and they were bound to stick to them. Opportunity was dictated by one's social position and inheritance. Francis rejected these social barriers and created a community of inclusion. Any man could come into the community, as long as he was willing to be non-possessive (i.e. give up all he had and give it to the poor) and be willing to serve and not be served. Francis' spirit of inclusion was divinely driven. One of the great revolutions in Francis' spirituality was his exchange of a majestic God for a humble one. The God that he had grown up with was a royal divinity, enthroned for the final judgment of humankind. Instead, the mature Francis reverenced the humble Christ, the naked figure in the manger and on the cross. He fell in love with the Christ who owned nothing and embraced everything in creation to save humankind in His passion and death.

I believe we must build a fraternal economy within our provinces and across our provinces. We cannot reproduce in our own economic arrangements the radical inequalities that now structure our civic and political arrangements. We must model a new economic arrangement that refuses to accept gross inequities, unfair advantages and unequal distributions of resources leaving some friars privileged and others deprived. Otherwise, we obscure a God who is generous and abundant.[13]

Thus, a fraternal economy is radically inclusive. It seeks a social and ethical space for every man, woman, and child. Its privileges are not for the few. God's gifts are "for the many." The fraternal economy is not based on limits and deficiencies. Francis' God is an abundant God, a self-diffusive God of generosity, that calls humankind to a similar attitude of dispossession and generosity. The God of Adam Smith, the god

[10] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
[11] Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 53.
[12] Couturier, op. cit., 77.
[13] David B. Couturier, *Franciscans and their Finances: Economics in a Disenchanted World* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2016).

who controls our markers, by contrast, is a quite stingy God.[14] The world elaborated by the Enlightenment is a creation bounded by limits, a zero sum game of inevitable winners and losers. Not so for the Franciscan movement. The abundant and loving God is creative and generous and God's world is lush with possibility and ingenuity. God's creation is a vast and interdependent network, a communion of social beings with an inestimable potential for service and goodness.

Dignity

Spiritual writers have always stressed the dignity that Francis bestowed on the leper when he kissed and embraced this rejected man on the roadside. Actually, I think there is more to this story than that. I believe that it was Francis who remained ever grateful to the leper for accepting Francis, while he (Francis) was still steeped in his sins. The leper was the one who accepted Francis fully and completely. The leper's wounds were only skin-deep. Francis' vulnerabilities, his disgust with vulnerable "others," were deep in his soul. Francis was grateful that the leper saw a dignity in him that Francis could not see or own in himself at the time. What Francis learned in this encounter was the inestimable dignity of every human being, no matter his or her physical challenges, emotional problems or social inheritance. Every human being has a rightful place and an inalienable dignity, which is neither worked for nor earned.

We live in a time where people's worth is calibrated by their careers. Their standing is determined by their ability to produce and serve the insatiable needs of a consumerist society. Increasingly, one must earn one's health care, at least in America and across the globe where our friars work. One has to afford one's education and the chance to succeed. Tragically, one has to have the right skin tone to be a true American or Canadian in our increasingly racialized immigration patterns. Our countries still have ways to go to provide an equal access to employment and fair pay for women and minorities, especially in urban areas.[15]

The fraternal economy recognizes rights that are still only partial or highly limited in our competitive and aggressive social compact. A fraternal economy recognizes the right to life, health care, work, education, a living wage, as a well as the right to contribute from the wellsprings of one's talents, creativity, vision, and hopes without the obstacles artificially imposed by cultural conventions or social bias.

Beauty

Our consumer society is eminently practical but it is constraining us to produce only those things that can be bought and sold, consumed, destroyed, and recast for further profit. Those of us who teach in liberal arts colleges and universities know how strong the temptation there is today to reduce the ideal of learning only to career goals, those courses and those topics that can get one a job and produce a paycheck and an

[14] Harvey Cox, *The Market as God* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[15] Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2013). Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada, *Income Inequality in Canada: The Urban Gap* (July 2017) accessed at: https://www.cpacanada.ca/en/the-cpa-profession/about-cpa-canada/cpa-canadas-key-activities/public-policy-and-government-relations/cpa-canada-economic-policy-research/income-inequality-in-canada; Andrew Jackson writes of income inequality in Canada, "Less attention has been paid to the fact that income inequality rose from 2005 to 2015, with the highest income groups continuing to pull away from the broad middle class and poverty continuing to increase." (The Globe and Mail, October 8, 2017) accessed at: https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/rob-commentary/census-shows-income-inequality-is-on-the-rise/article36524022/.

immediate payback.[16] Our educational vision, wrapped tightly around the logic of developing one's profession and establishing one's career, is losing sight of the intuitions and insights for building a character and liberating us from the hazards of consumption.

The fraternal economy, on the other hand, establishes the priority that we are made for a way of beauty. All men and women deserve to live, experience and contribute to the diversity of God's beautiful world. Beauty accepts the diversity of personality and talent of every individual. It accepts the Scotist principle of *hacceitas*, that God loves the "this-ness" of each creature. God is not in love with humanity. God loves this child and that child, this woman and that woman, this man and that man. Beauty brings visibility to the lives of those who can easily fade into the background of today's economic and political discourse. Beauty promotes the ideal that every one of God's creatures is allowed to express themselves in all their awesome diversity. This makes education in beauty a necessity for the integrity of every organization. Unfortunately, the arts have become a luxury we can ill afford in our consumerist society. Young people, especially in our urban minority communities, are systematically deprived of their right to beauty and an engagement with nature and the arts. The fraternal economy reverses priorities and re-establishes our communion with God and God's good earth.

In the Franciscan tradition, God is Beautiful and creates a world, which is immensely and gloriously beautiful. Because of this, the natural stance of the human person is one of awe in the face of a world steeped in wondrous colors and exquisite sounds. We need a holistic pedagogy and an ethos that engages us in the beautiful. This is what Mary Beth Ingham reminds us of when she says, "Beauty is the foundational human experience that unites mind and heart, spirit and body, activity and passivity, embracing and transcending time, culture, and point of view. Creation of beauty in art, literature, poetry and music is a distinguishing characteristic of the human person and every human culture."[17]

A new Franciscan organizational identity will reserve a space for beauty and engage individuals and communities openly and fully (not begrudgingly) in music, literature, poetry, in the full range of the arts, along with experiences with and for nature, in a conscious and loving solidarity and communion with creation. Our commitment to beauty needs to be translated into a more conscious and robust engagement with the integrity of creation. (I realize that an American cannot evangelize on this question as long as we are the only nation on the planet that has withdrawn its commitment to protecting the environment.)

In my experience, limited as it is, there are very few Franciscan communities of men who stand out in their commitment to beauty. Unfortunately, we leave beauty to women. This is unfortunate. We could become quite counter-cultural if we devise masculine ways to engage the love of creation. Too often, our hyper-masculine identity boxes men into a culture of guns, hunting and the despoiling of the natural world for profit. Perhaps my Canadian brothers can help us Americans in our tragic obsession with guns. It is literally killing our children and us. We need a new paradigm and we may need to look north for help.

[16] Maritime colleges and universities have seen a 39% decrease in the number of enrollments in liberal arts programs. CBC News (February 16, 2016) accessed at: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/humanities-enrolment-maritime-universities-1.3445694.

[17] Mary Beth Ingham, "Framing a Transformative Franciscan Ethos: The Challenge of Excellence at SBU," *Franciscan Connections* 67:3 (Fall 2017), 25.

Creation

We have already tipped our hand when it comes to a new creation-centered communion. It is only now dawning on people around the world just how much of the planet and our future we have sacrificed in the pursuit of our aggressive consumerism. "Climate change" is a soft-phrase for the long-term destruction we are causing for the short-term profits we have amassed during our lifetime alone. It is easy to trivialize the image of Francis of Assisi. I was recently taken to task by a Franciscan who thought I was setting back the cause of good Franciscanism by the choice I made for the cover of a new book about the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition. The Franciscan accused me of perpetuating the image of Francis in a birdbath. Horror of horrors. I actually thought the cover choice was a good one, progressive, sensitive, modern and beautiful, with no birdbath in sight. Nevertheless, the point is well taken. Our age is still too insensitive to the dangerous realities of climate change and we dare not feed this toxic apathy. We are, after all, still too blasé about the ways we pollute our oceans and destroy our forests. We are still too shortsighted in recognizing how badly we treat our sister, "mother earth," and how selfish we are toward the generations who will follow us.

A fraternal economy is not based on an ethic of demand and destroy. It is fundamentally derived from an attitude of gift, one that generates possibility by a non-possessive spirit of gratitude. Francis had a deep love and respect for all creation. He was so respectful that he would stop on the road and move a worm to the side of the road to protect it from being stepped on. In addition, Francis composed his immensely beautiful *Canticle of the Creatures*, praising God for Brother Sun and Sister Moon, even though he was suffering from an excruciating eye disease that left him virtually blind and unable to bear sunlight or even the flicker of an evening candle.

Today's modern economy is individualistic and highly competitive. Its anthropological presuppositions are forged in Enlightenment principles of self-interest and division. In traditional economic theory, concepts such as trust, bonding, and empathy are systematically ignored since it is held a priori that individuals cannot but act exclusively on the basis of personal preferences and selfish interests. New research in neuro-economics are finding, using MRI imaging, that the human brain is hard-wired to cooperate rather than compete and people are conditioned to act pro-socially, even when the possibility of future interaction is low or even zero. New research indicates that people are more altruistic and cooperative than traditional economics presumes.[18]

Transparency and Accountability

There are a few more values that could underpin the Franciscan fraternal economy and a new organizational identity. Let me trace them very briefly as I wrap up. These values undergird and strengthen the personal, relational, and collective well-being that derive from a profoundly fraternal or social economy. They are transparency, accountability, dialogue, solidarity, and austerity.

In a fraternal economy that is service-oriented rather than self-interested, one is guided by rules of transparency and mutual accountability. Accounts are open for scrutiny and inspection. Secrecy and stealth are discouraged and prohibited. Truth is guaranteed by active involvement and honest dialogue throughout

[18] David B. Couturier, *The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics* (South Bend, IN; Cloverdale Books, 2007), 12.

the system. The normalization of corporate deviancy is averted by a compunction of cooperation at every level of the organization.

Solidarity

Because a fraternal economy is founded on an attitude of communion, it is also distinguished by a program of solidarity. A fraternal economy has a conscience for the marginalized other and continually reaches out, giving back to the larger society, reminding all employees and every worker that doing well also means doing good.

Austerity

Honestly, this generosity comes at a price. The final virtue of a new Franciscan organizational identity may be its hardest to understand and undertake. In a way, austerity sets a limit to profit in the sense that it sets aside some of its wealth, even significantly so, to help one's neighbor, strengthen one's community and build up one's society. The evidence from new "economies of communion" indicate that a social conscience is good for business and wins good will, stronger loyalty and an enduring respect from customers in ways that ordinary profit-bearing institutions cannot manage. A renewed Franciscan organizational identity must have a logic to curb our century's increasing income gap that leaves the upper levels of society to rake in the vast majority of society's profits, leaving the middle class and lower class of citizens to stagnate or fall further behind.[19]

Conclusion

In this presentation, we have tried to develop the foundations of a new Franciscan organizational identity. We can summarize this Franciscan imagination as an ethos of goodness, abundance, dignity, communion, inclusion, minority, beauty, peace, solidarity and fraternity.

As stated at the beginning of this presentation, it is rare that institutions get a chance to refound themselves and to develop a new organizational identity. We are in a time, one might argue, of dramatic cultural turbulence and unprecedented religious confusion. It is my conviction that the Franciscan ethos of fraternal goodness that we have before us is not only attractive but also palliative, a relief for the fears and anxieties that are rocking our politics and economics. We have an opportunity, just as Francis and Clare did, to make a profound difference in the social imagination of our sisters and brothers. By engaging these elements of Franciscan organizational identity, we can become communities of fraternal empowerment, with a new narrative of relational intentionality, in love with God and in service to the world.

Our Franciscan Intellectual Tradition provides us incredible resources with which to do so.

The question remains yours, "What will be your purpose as a new province? Why do you exist and why are you here?" I pray that you will answer these questions with hope, passion and deep fraternal love.

[19] Anthony B. Atkinson, *Inequality: What Can Be Done* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

David B. Couturier, OFM Cap., is the Executive Director of the Franciscan Institute and Associate Professor of Theology and Franciscan Studies at St. Bonaventure University in Western New York. He holds graduate degrees in clinical psychology, pastoral counseling and the psychology of organizational development.