

Naked in the Public Square Millennials and the Hopes for a New Franciscan Economy

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A young man in his twenties stands naked in the public square. Across from him is the father who once pinned his pride and dreams on this young man just home from war. The father now sees his son as nothing more than deranged, deluded and dangerous. Beside the naked figure stands a bishop uncertain as to whether this is just an ugly squabble breaking a family apart or a religious delusion beginning to fracture a young man's mind and his future. Naked in the public square, this young man begins a revolution that would critique the violence and greed of his time and pass judgment on both the civil and religious leaders of his day. This provocative display of nudity, with its incarnate wisdom centered on minority, simplicity and a cosmic fraternity, created a new ethical space in the medieval world and it can do so again today for a generation of Millennials, disillusioned by the greed and violence of our times and increasingly working without a God to guide them. Our task today is to introduce the young man in the public square to a generation of young women and men increasingly disillusioned by political, corporate and even religious systems they believe are rigged against them. To do so, we have to focus our attention on that which disenchanting the young man in the 13th century and that which dissatisfies the young men and women of the 21st: economics. We need to see the young man's ritual in the public square not simply as a profoundly religious gesture, which indeed it was, but also one that stands as a provocatively revolutionary repudiation of the economics of his time.

Separated by eight hundred years, these twenty-something's share a common realization – that the economy is rigged against them, but not just financially. Their mutual disenchantment is deeper. There is a dawning realization between them, one that outpaces the centuries, that their modern economies, different as they are, similarly cripple their transcendent desires and deprive them of a God who can console and save them. Deep within their gestures, misunderstood as madness in the 13th century as it is in the 21st century, is a profound religious impulse that yearns for a God of abundance not scarcity, a God of approachable goodness not distant vengeance. Millennials have been dismissed by the churches as sadly uninterested in things divine.¹ Their lack of attendance at our services seems to justify their exemption from theological reflection and ministry. But, as we will see, I believe they are being sorely misunderstood. They are groping for a justification and a remedy for a world profoundly imbalanced

¹ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Re-Thinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

between those who have and those who do not, those who are massively privileged and those who are enormously deprived.²

For more than fifty years, the discourse of philosophy and theology has concentrated on a rhetoric of *diversity* and its remedy and, necessarily so, given the constructs of patriarchy, universality and uniformity we have inherited from modernity.³ We as Franciscans have worked mightily in the prophetic challenge of society and our church with our “discourses of concern for traditions lost, claims ignored, rights denied, positions assumed, voices suppressed and histories resisted.”⁴

But, the challenge of Millennials is not on the constructs of *diversity*. For them, that debate is settled, even if the structures of society and church are still slow to follow. For Millennials, the movement is from diversity to disparity. It lies with the recognition that the twenty-first century, now well into its second decade, reveals an ever frightening reality – a world “in extremis,” a world in which global poverty is extreme and the disparity between the privileged and powerful few and the destitute and powerless many grows exponentially with each passing day and election.⁵

It is time for the naked young man of the 13th century and the disenchanting young adults of the 21st to meet in the public square. Let’s meet Francis again, as if for the first time.

² For a deeper exploration of the spirituality of Millennials, cf. David B. Couturier, “Spirituality Interrupted: Young Adults and the Franciscan Imagination,” *Franciscan Connections* 65:2 (June 2015), 24-31; Chuck Collins, *99 to 1: How Wealth Inequality Is Wrecking the World and What We Can Do about It* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2012).

³ Gavin D’Costa, “Theology and Religious Diversity,” in Chad Meister, ed., *The Oxford Handbook on Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003); John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004); Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995); Rebecca Kratz Mays, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots* (Philadelphia: Ecumenical Press, 2008); Ken J. Walden, *Practical Theology for Church Diversity: A Guide for Clergy and Congregation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015)

⁴ David B. Couturier, OFM Cap., *Franciscans and their Finances: Economics in a Disenchanted World* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2015), 229.

⁵ David B. Couturier, “A World in Extremis: Toward a Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics,” in *Franciscans and their Finances*, 227-242.

The Naked Young Man in the Public Square

Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) lived in a time of incredible violence and enormous greed.⁶ The son of a wealthy cloth merchant, he lived the high-life and fast lane adolescence of an up and coming new generation of financial entrepreneurs. He was a walking advertisement for his father's fashion business and he was his father's promise for an economy based on hard work and merit not inheritance, as was the way of wealth in medieval times. He and his father were devoted to a new social ideal whereby families could work their way into the upper class and actually create status for those not born into privilege. Francis' father 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 toll booths erected by noble families to keep them and no others in the privileged lifestyles to which they had become accustomed. Francis' father wanted to create a new model whereby people made money a new-fashioned way: they would earn it. It was a radical ideal that Francis and his father, Pietro, promoted and a dangerous one for the times in which they lived.

The medieval world knew almost nothing of "upward mobility," as we now know and suppose it. And the "majores" of Francis' day were not about to allow access to wealth that easily. The world, as they knew and wanted it, was designed for a hierarchy of the few above the many.

The tensions that developed in the 12th and 13th centuries around these questions of access and merit, privilege and power often turned deadly. It was a contest that Francis was at first willing to take up.

His adolescent dreams were of becoming a knight for the good and glory of Assisi. It was a dream that his father was only too willing to support. He outfitted Francis with the best military gear available. Francis, the playful darling of his friends, went to war with the blessing and the hopes of his family. But, 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. He was never the same afterwards.

Like many soldiers before and after him, Francis had seen the fatal 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 Valley. Francis was deeply shaken by what he experienced. Francis would never

⁶ David B. Couturier, "Franciscan Economics in a Disenchanted World," *Franciscan Connections* 65:3 (September, 2015), 41-43.

pick up a sword again. However, Francis went further by questioning the roots of the violence and greed that had consumed his time and imagination. He understood something that many had missed in their justifications for violence in the name of privilege, namely that God was being implicated and even convicted by association with the greed of the day.

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 in his time. But, something changed in his view of God after his experience of war. His well-chronicled conversion included not just sensitivity to the poor and a wondrous appreciation for the lowliest of creatures in nature. It also 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.

Francis came to the conviction that it was this tender and kind God that was obscured and defaced by the violence and greed of his world and its economic schemes. And so, it became Francis' mission to reveal once again the goodness of God, which was to be found in abundance in the lowliest and most vulnerable of creatures.⁷ The logic of having by losing, getting by giving, pursuing light by dancing in the darkness, and claiming joy in the very collapse of sorrow was paradoxically enticing, the kind of twist in spiritual knowledge and action that only a *jongleur de Dieu* could perform. In the enigmatic way of mystics, Francis' "economy of abundance" was created by a poverty of dispossession.

Francis embarked on a new 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. And 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.

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

⁷ William B. Short, OFM, "What is the Franciscan Imagination," *Franciscan Connections* 65:1 (March, 2015), 8-12.

was by emptiness. And, as his Franciscan brothers and sisters soon learned, this insight would have enormous impact for their use of money and their activities in the economic world. Their efforts to develop a fraternal or relational economy were not designed to reject or denigrate the world. They did not embark on poverty to castigate and bypass the natural world in order to “get to heaven” as quickly as possible. Quite the opposite!

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 stinginess. And so, he created an economic model and plan of life that re-directed the brothers and sisters away from aggression and power-building.

Let’s now meet Millennials as they enter the public square. Who are they? What do they want and what do they need from us as Franciscans?

Millennials in the Public Square

Once again young adults, largely in their twenties, enter the public square. But, they are less likely to critique their parents than Francis. This wary and worried generation, according to sociologist Paul Taylor, is economically ever more dependent on their parents well into their thirties. It is estimated that 40% of them still live at home with their parents or have boomeranged back after college. Taylor tells us why:

Millennials came of age in the nineties and oughts, an era of global terrorism, of domestic school shootings, Columbine, 9/11, a lot of pretty horrible things that are particularly disturbing to parents. They worry about strangers online, online predators and all the rest... There is a kind of an everybody gets a trophy quality to the way millennials have been raised. You’re precious. It’s a mean and difficult world. I need to protect you. Which may then be picked up by the children raised this way as you better be careful, you better be wary.⁸

⁸ Paul Taylor, *The Next America: Boomers, Millennials, and the Looming Generational Showdown* (New York: Public Affairs, 2014).

For the Millennial generation, Mom and Dad are not the enemy of the good; they are “the ultimate safety net” in a very bad economic world.

There is an implicit and quiet critique or wariness, not of their Mom and Dad, but of all institutions, including marriage and family. This peer-based generation has entered what sociologists have called the beginning of a post-familial age, where the number of Americans who are living alone has shot up from 9 percent in 1950 to 28 percent today. In 1990, 65 percent of Americans said that children were very important to a successful marriage. Now, only 41 percent of Americans say they believe that children are important, and today, there are now more American houses with dogs than with children.⁹

When the young adults of the Millennial generation enter the public square, it is doubtful that a bishop will know how to mediate or throw his mantle around them. The public square has become a toxic place and the role of bishops has become contentious and confusing.¹⁰ More than likely, Millennials may not recognize that a bishop is even in the public square, as we will see. The times are different.

Millennials who enter the public square are a generation of young men and women between the ages of 18 and 34 and are, as one commentator described them, “not only different (from previous generations) but discontinuously so.”¹¹ They are a generation who experience the volume and velocity of change in unprecedented measure, across every platform of their lives – social, psychological, technological, cultural, economic and religious. And they are the first generation to try to negotiate their issues largely without reference to religion in any significant way. As they enter the public square, they are a generation that ponders the world and its issues with categories vastly different from those that shaped our own.

Something is changing dramatically in our relationship with this cohort of incredibly optimistic, genuinely entrepreneurial, and powerfully interconnected young men and women.¹² For the first time in the history of Christianity, young people rarely look at us, priests and religious, as their mediators of the divine or interpreters of the spiritual. What has changed?

⁹ Joel Kotkin, *The Rise of Post-familialism: Humanity's Future* (Singapore: Civil Service College, 2012);

¹⁰ Robert John Araujo, S.J., “A Trinity of Viewpoints on the Moral Perspective in the Public Square: Murray, Kennedy, and Cuomo,” *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Pub. Policy* (2013), 333-376; Timothy A. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Bob Bufford in D. Kinnaman, *op.cit.*

¹² David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

Changes in the Relationship between Priests, Religious and People

As I reported recently in an article on the dynamics between the Church and people, the relationship between Catholics, priests and religious is undergoing a dramatic change.¹³ For Catholics who go to church regularly, our relationship with them is relatively strong. By and large, we have our people's loyalty and enjoy their respect. We have earned this respect because we continue to meet people's basic pastoral needs – providing the Eucharist in ways that people can actively participate and applying God's Word to real life issues and problems. We continue to visit the sick, feed the hungry, educate young people and teach religion to children. We offer comfort to the dying. We have re-organized our ministries with a more clearly articulated sense of mission, along with a greater spirit of collaboration and accountability to the lay faithful. As the outpouring of support that women religious received during the awful time of the Vatican investigation demonstrated, Catholics have been paying attention and approve of our work, especially with those who are most marginalized in American society and around the world. In broad terms, therefore, we can say that for those who come to Church and our religious programs regularly, our pastoral relationship is relatively strong. However, this is part, a very small part, of the story of what's happening to American Catholics. Let me be blunt.

Demographics indicate that the vast majority of Catholics in the United States has increasingly little or no significant contact with a priest or religious. For the majority of Catholics, priests and religious are neither a significant nor even an occasional force in their lives, if regular attendance at Church or Church programs is even the modest baseline of a pastoral relationship. For example, to this point, the average weekly attendance at Mass across the country now stands at approximately 24%.¹⁴ But, rates in some dioceses continue to track much lower. In the Archdiocese of Boston, for example, weekly attendance has dropped to about 15%.¹⁵ Not so many years ago, the Archdiocese boasted rates in the 60 and 70% range. When we look at the generations attending Mass on a weekly or even a monthly basis, we see progressive erosion.¹⁶ Among Catholics seventy years or older, 64% go at least once a month and 45% go once a week. For Catholics between the ages of 52 and 69, attendance at Mass stands at 24%. Among Catholics between the ages of 31 and 51, 15% go to Mass on a weekly basis. For those between 18 and 30, that

¹³ This section on the changing dynamics between the church and young adults is adapted from my article on "Catholics Priests and their People," in John Moses, ed., *Foundation Theology 2014* (Mishawaka, IN: Graduate Theological Foundation, 2014), 75-92.

¹⁴ Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, "Frequently Requested Statistics," Retrieved December 30, 2013 from www.cara.georgetown.edu/CARA_Services/requestedchurchstats.html.

¹⁵ Annual October Mass Count and Sacramental Index (2011). Office of Pastoral Planning Boston.

¹⁶ CARA, op.cit.

number stands at 18%. Research demonstrates that young adult Catholics do not see or experience a priest on a weekly or even a monthly basis.

We can now say that the vast majority of Catholics in America has no relationship and little contact with a priest. Priests no longer say Mass for them and no longer preach to them. Priests are no longer their confessors, spiritual directors or pastoral counselors. Priests are no longer their teachers of the faith or guides on the spiritual journey. Priests rarely marry them. In some dioceses, the rate of Catholic weddings has dropped 75% in the last 15- 20 years.¹⁷

These numbers reflect what is happening across the country – a rise in the number of individuals called “nones,” 23% of adults who now identify themselves as religiously non-affiliated. As Michael Lipka, editor at the Pew Center for Research, adds -- “Religiously unaffiliated Americans are younger, on average, than the general public to begin with, and the youngest adults in the group – that is, those who have entered adulthood in the last several years – are even less religious than “nones” overall.” He continues,

Fully seven-in-ten of these youngest Millennials (born between 1990 and 1996) with no religious affiliation say religion is not important in their lives. A similar share (70%) also say they seldom or never pray and 42% say they do not believe in God, all bigger percentages than among religious “nones” as a whole.¹⁸

Why is the Relationship Changing?

Why the fracture in our relationship with Catholics? I believe the problem we are experiencing is the result of a growing “lack of fit” between what Catholics need from the Church and what they expect to get. There was a time when expectation and experience were more closely aligned and Catholics felt what researchers refer to as an experience of ‘religious wellbeing’.¹⁹ However, for more than forty years now, there has been a growing disconnect developing between the Church and people over what are considered legitimate pastoral needs.

¹⁷ Couturier, October Mass Count, op. cit.

¹⁸ Michael Lipka, “Religious ‘nones’ are not only growing, they’re becoming more secular,” Fact Tanks : News in the Numbers (November 11, 2015), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/11/religious-nones-are-not-only-growing-theyre-becoming-more-secular/>.

¹⁹ R.K. Bufford et al., « Norms for the Spiritual Well Being Scale, » *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 19 (1991), 56-70.

Today Catholics are trying to do what they have always done – negotiate love and family, jobs and careers, sickness and health, greed and generosity. But, they do so in a vastly different context. When our Catholic ancestors came to this country (largely) as immigrants, they did so with a twofold purpose: to defend the faith in an alien land and to move a generation of Catholics up and out of disadvantage as quickly as possible. The Church, through our religious communities, erected powerful institutions to accomplish those twin tasks. We built strong neighborhood churches and the largest and most successful private school network the world had ever known. We created a vast complex of hospitals, orphanages and charitable associations. In short, we built the pastoral institutions needed by the people of the time with a united mission and a cohesive sense of purpose. If Catholics demonstrated a cooperative relationship with priests and religious back then, it was because they felt they could call on priests and religious to provide them with the skills, virtues and institutions they needed to live as good Catholics and authentic Americans. Catholics trusted that we understood the times in which they lived and had intelligent and practical pastoral tools with which to engage them. Religion wasn't simply a matter of polemics back then. The Church was concretely present and institutionally helpful when young people were making their decisions on what career or vocation to pursue, who and when to marry, and how to raise a family.²⁰

A New Relationship with Young Adults

Things have changed dramatically in the pastoral relationship we have with the new generation of emerging adults, who are 50.7% of the adult population today.²¹ It is my contention that young adults just don't see or experience priests and religious significantly in their lives; they can't feel our pastoral care through the fog of consumerism that envelops them in the day to day. We have yet to understand the issues that concern young people today. Because of this, we have not been able to translate those concerns into institutions that are helpful to a new generation of Catholics. Young Catholics have new challenges in front of them, tasks that have to do with two overwhelming realities: the reinvention of work in a global world and the untested rules governing the "new economy."²²

²⁰ R. Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

²¹ C. Smith and P. Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²² David B. Couturier, "The Reinvention of Work in Religious Communities of Men," *New Theology Review* 11:3 (1998), 22-35.

To have a relationship with young adults today starts with understanding that the landscape of their lives is being re-arranged by unprecedented economic forces. Young adults experience, as I have indicated above, an unprecedented volume and velocity of change across all the platforms of their lives. And they experience this massive change without mediating interpretive forces of religion. America has already moved from a largely relational culture that once placed a priority on family and faith to a new global work culture that places a high priority and exacts a heavy price on one's work and career above all else.²³

Young people are watching as old economic rules are being reworked for the benefit of a shrinking minority of Americans. They are living with increasing obligations, dwindling benefits and fewer guarantees. A college education is no longer a sure bet for employment in America. Research done at Georgetown University recently asked Millennials what their greatest concerns were. Seventy-six percent (76%) of them said unemployment and finding a job. Their second greatest concern mentioned future economic problems, viz., addressing the federal deficit.²⁴ With jobs becoming more of a gamble and educational debt ready to saddle college graduates for the next twenty or more years, young people are delaying decisions about love, marriage, family, and settling down well into their thirties. Indeed, the turbulence of the modern economy makes marriage less attractive and more vulnerable, especially and surprisingly in the conservative heartland of America.²⁵

The sad fact is that most of the important decisions of young adult Catholics, those about sexuality, marriage, friends, careers and children, are happening out of the reach of our communities and congregations. Our institutions of support no longer match up to the tasks and needs of young adults. With inconsistent attention from traditional institutions, this generation is devising a more "improvisational" style of religious and social engagement, in almost everything it does.²⁶ These young adults have demonstrated that they are not interested in the polarizing debates that occupy the minds and pulpits of previous generations, i.e. Boomers. Let me put our ecclesial dilemma in a succinct form.

²³ David B. Couturier, *The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics* (South Bend, IN: Cloverdale Books, 2007).

²⁴ R.P. Jones, D. Cox, and T. Brancroft, "A Generation in Transition: Religion, Values and Politics Among College Age Millennials: Findings from the 2012 Millennial Values Survey. Accessed: www.publicreligion.org/uploads/2012/04/Millennial-Survey-Report, pdf.

²⁵ W.B. Wilcox, *When Marriage Disappears: The Retreat from Marriage in Middle America* (University of Virginia: National Marriage Project, 2010).

²⁶ Wuthnow, xvi.

When a previous generation needed to defend the faith and asked for an education to lift its generation out of disadvantage as quickly as possible, the Church provided first rate schools and universities all across this country. And, when America had few social safety nets for the poor, priests and religious built the largest and most effective private network of hospitals, orphanages, and charitable institutions the world had ever known. And now, when a younger, post-boomer generation of Catholics worries about jobs, unemployment, the state of the economy, and how they're going to make it with the burden of debt they are likely to inherit as a result of the unfunded military and social liabilities we have accumulated and the tax cuts we have endorsed, what has been the response of our communities and congregations?

The wholesale migration from a largely relational to a new global work culture exacts a heavy toll on young people. It subordinates all commitments to the totalizing demands of profit at all costs. It is a devastating spiritual crisis in the West, transposing the desire for the infinity of God into a desire for the infinity of goods and robbing us of our ability to form secure and lasting relationships, especially with those in need.²⁷ The problem remains that the Church doesn't yet have a language or a practice at the local level that addresses the economic trauma young people around the world are facing.

Millennials enter the public square spiritually and emotionally traumatized by an economy that leaves them overwhelmed, alienated and spiritually abandoned. The question obtains – what can the Franciscan imagination offer young adults today? What can the great federation of Franciscans do that can make a difference in the hopes and dreams of the Millennial generation?

The Fraternal Economy

For almost 20 years now, Capuchins around the world have been redesigning the economic model on which they exercise their life and ministries.²⁸ The effort began simply enough when three friars from Africa stood up towards the end of what had been a quite routine, almost boring, General Chapter in Rome. Without a trace of contempt or arrogance in their voice or demeanor, the three friars declared that the Capuchin Order had not heard and was not responding to the cry of the poor in Africa?

The two hundred delegates from across the globe were shocked; indeed, some were angry at the claim. Had not the friars sent missionaries to the African continent? Had they not built parishes, schools, hospitals and clinics? Had they not educated young people in schools and colleges, developed farms and

²⁷ David B. Couturier, *Franciscans and their Finances: Economics in a Disenchanted World* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2015), 141-148.

²⁸ David B. Couturier, "The Rise of the Fraternal Economy in the Capuchin Franciscan Order," Michaël Mutzner and Alessandra Aula, *World Poverty: Franciscan Reflections* (Geneva: Franciscans International, 2007), 7-16.

done what they could to feed the poor? The debate was powerful because the charge was so intense. The African friars did not back down. They explained that the cry of the poor was strong and getting stronger. Capuchins couldn't hear it, despite our love, charity and heroic work in the poorest regions of the world, because we could not see and had not recognized that the very way we lived and ministered reflected the very same patterns of structural injustice that kept African poverty securely in place.

What the African friars explained was that the Capuchin Order itself, in its own economic structures and decision-making processes, mirrored the structural division of privilege and misery that exists in the world today. On a smaller scale our global Franciscan community of incredibly dedicated and prayerful friars, the delegates came to realize, was nonetheless shaped by and acting within the same unequal and polarizing schemas that divide the developed world from the so-called developing world. When it comes to economics, we were not much different from every other institution or government across the globe.

I spent the flight home from this soul-shaking General Chapter writing the outline for my first book, *The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics*.²⁹ Here is how I would describe the unequal and polarizing scheme we realized was true of us as Capuchins:

Franciscans have always been suspicious of models that require privacy, isolation and aggression as foundational elements. They are looking for forms of economic activity that build communion rather than competition. They have come to realize that current economic models actually increase insecurity and justify exclusion and inequality as simply collateral damage of the “invisible hand” of the Market.³⁰

The economic divide splits the Capuchin Order. If one enters Capuchin life in the North, one is assured of a solid education, a secure job, a safe household, and excellent health care. If, on the other hand, one enters Capuchin life in the South, one is almost as likely to be assured of a limited education, a doubtful pension, unsafe conditions and no guarantee of access to quality or even adequate medical care. Two roads diverge from the beginning of Capuchin life and they are unequal, unstable and unfair. And we call ourselves “brothers.” There has been in the Capuchin Franciscan Order two pathways and one brotherhood. This disparity has led Capuchins to a total re-evaluation of the economic structures of the Order. It has led us to research the meaning of Franciscan poverty and to re-evaluate how we go about serving the needs of young adults today.

²⁹ David B. Couturier, *The Fraternal Economy: A Pastoral Psychology of Franciscan Economics* (South Bend, IN: Cloverdale Books, 2007).

³⁰ Couturier, *Franciscans and Finances*, 69-70.

The first thing we learned was that the intention of Francis was to found a fraternity of brothers and sisters, men and women aware of and emboldened by the interdependence and solidarity they had with one another and, indeed, with all creatures under a God he had come to recognize was good, all good, supremely good, all the time and to everyone.

The goal of Franciscan life is not primarily about ministry; it is fundamentally about relationship. And, in that light, our Franciscan poverty is not about asceticism per se. It is not primarily about penance by deprivation. It is clearly not about rejecting the beauty of God's great gifts or the Lord's generous abundance towards us. It is not a negation of creativity, ingenuity, freedom and the expression of one's gifts and talents. In a world of tremendous violence and amazing greed, Francis saw poverty in relational terms, as the protection of community. It was the safeguard for the equal, intimate and transcendent relationship we were to forge with one another and in the world.

Against the customs of the time, Francis admitted brothers of every station, status and walk of life into the fraternity, without discrimination or preference. Francis allowed the uneducated to join; he admitted priests into the fraternity, on one condition – that they demanded no preferential treatment and required no privileges or exemptions from ordinary labor. All came with the same requisite: to forfeit everything they owned and give it to the poor. In that way, all the brothers began at the same place, *sine proprio*, with nothing of their own.³¹ And, with nothing of their own, they would depend only on one another for their life, building their love for one another out of the shared sacrifices they endured and the common praise they sang to the Lord for each and every kindness generously accorded them by the goodness of others.

Francis even refused the brothers the ability to touch coins, for coins in his day had become the measure of a person's worth and the scale on which a person's dignity was counted. And Francis knew a powerful truth: nothing could adequately compute the infinite dignity and immeasurable worth of those who had been loved, saved and redeemed by the mercy of the Christ.

And so, the friars began to construct a new way of thinking about economics, money, access, work and merit in society. Long before the likes of Adam Smith, the friars began to write books on economic theory, the principles of accounting, double-entry bookkeeping, the just wage and the just profit.³² All of

³¹ cf. "Sine Proprio and the New Narrative of Relationality," in Couturier, *Franciscans and their Finances*, 232 ff.

³² Sylvain Piron, ed. *Peter of John Olivi: On Contracts* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2016).

it deriving from a rich and relational view of God as self-diffusive love and abundant goodness, God as a “free communion of persons without domination or deprivation.”³³

Our great witness is our poverty and minority. As Franciscans we are meant to live in the joy and security of “redeemed relationships” that are protected and advanced by a fraternal or relational economy, one that refuses the hierarchy of domination or deprivation of any member. Our task in all we do is to foster Trinitarian relations of non-domination and non-deprivation across the social spectrum, so that all men and women are gathered at work, at home, in the marketplace or in the public square, as a free communion of persons without domination or deprivation.

Millennials know that we hardly live that way in the world today. They see the increasing dominance and powerful rise of the 1% and they recognize the accelerating deprivations of the 99%. Around the world there is a growing protest against the dangerous tide of unemployment among Millennials, in the range of 45-55% in Spain, Greece, Italy and other parts of Europe and throughout the Middle East. This interconnected and digitalized generation knows the fact how tragic is the situation of hunger and early death across the world:

- Approximately 6.5 million children die each year from malnutrition and hunger.³⁴
- 21,000 children will die today because of poverty, hunger and poor sanitation.³⁵
- 795 million people, or one in nine people on the planet, are suffering from chronic undernourishment in 2014-2016, almost all whom (780 million) live in developing countries, representing 12.9 percent, or one in eight, of the population of developing counties.³⁶
- 3.2 million children, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa are living with HIV;³⁷
- 2.5 billion people around the world still have no access to clean drinking water and proper sanitation.³⁸
- Every 90 seconds a child dies from water-related diseases.³⁹

³³ Couturier, *Franciscans and their Finances*, 254; Ewert H. Cousins, *Bonaventure and the Coincidence of Opposites* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1978).

³⁴ Hunger, United Nations. <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/food/childhunger.shtml>. Accessed: May 21, 2016.

³⁵ “State of the World’s Children, 2010,” Unicef, p. 18-19.

³⁶ “2015 World Hunger and Poverty Facts and Statistics,” <http://www.worldhunger.org/2015-world-hunger-and-poverty-facts-and-statistics/> accessed: May 21, 2016.

³⁷ World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/hiv/topics/paediatric/en/> . accessed: May 21, 2016.

³⁸ “The State of the World’s Children 2015,” (New York, Unicef, 2014).

http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/SOWC_2015_Summary_and_Tables.pdf

- *Human Rights Watch* estimates that hundreds of thousands of children, some as young as seven or eight, both girls and boys, have been forced into the front lines as child soldiers in almost every region of the world.⁴⁰ Two hundred child soldiers have died in the Syrian conflict alone in the last four years.⁴¹

What the Millennial generation lacks is a verifiable hope that economic life can be different and that we need not live by the economic “monopoly of imagination”⁴² that we have inherited. We need not be co-opted by the dictates of an increasingly consumerist mindset that requires us to follow its principle of “self-invention for self-sufficiency.”⁴³ We must believe in and foster the relational economy we have been handed that doesn’t require the inevitable and desperate marginalization of the poor. And we Franciscans must give evidence of the hope that a more relational economy is indeed possible, because we have practiced it and know its value.

There are five principles around which a fraternal or relational economy revolves.⁴⁴ It is my opinion that we must review our policies and actions and ask ourselves how well we are living the relational economy among us and, after that review, we must help our brothers and sisters, especially those of the Millennial generation to reconfigure their lives similarly. The five principles are these:

- *Transparency* – There is mutuality in all things: all the goods, economic activities, and ministerial decisions of members are at the service of the whole. There are no hidden schemes by leadership or membership. All economic actions are open and accountable.
- *Equity* – Individuals and communities get what they need and contribute what they have for the common good and for the building up of communion. Service replaces entitlement.

³⁹ 1. World Health Organization and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP). (2015) Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation, 2015 Update and MDG Assessment.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Facts about Child Soldiers,” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/12/03/facts-about-child-soldiers>.

⁴¹ “Maybe we live and maybe we die: Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups,” *Human Rights Watch* (June 22, 2014), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/06/22/maybe-we-live-and-maybe-we-die/recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups-syria>.

⁴² Walter Brueggemann, “Monopoly and Marginality in Imagination,” in *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1991) 184-204; *The Word that Redescribes the World: Bible and Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 139.

⁴³ Walter Brueggemann. *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: Preaching an Emancipating Word*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 4.

⁴⁴ Couturier, *Franciscans and their Finances*, 12.

- *Participation* – We build mechanisms of cooperation and a communion of persons without domination or deprivation. We widen the circle of decision-making and arrive at conclusions by dialogue.
- *Solidarity* – Those who have more give more to those deprived. All work to undo structures of sin that serve as obstacles to communion. The voice of the poor and of the victims of history is welcomed and observed.
- *Austerity* – The fraternity abides by the principle of “the minimum necessary not the maximum allowed.” The community lives and works simply, so others can simply live and work. What is left over by this “austerity” provides for the needs of others.

Conclusion

It is time for us as Franciscans to enter the public square, between our fathers and bishops once again – to translate the fraternal ideals of the naked young man of the 13th century to the Millennial young adults of the 21st.

The fraternal economy provides a palliative for a world increasingly and dangerously polarized between the privileged few and the destitute many. It affords a way beyond the terrorism, violence and greed of our time. It offers a view of the human person beyond the aggressive and individualistic paradigm of modern economics. It originates and glories in the symphonic praise of all creation in the God we know as good, all good, supremely good, all the time and to everyone. This is the abundant and self-diffusive love we have come to know in Jesus Christ, who is the Lord, forever and ever. Amen.

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