

A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR FRANCISCAN THEOLOGY¹

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“My brothers, the theology of this man (Francis of Assisi), held aloft in purity and contemplation, is an eagle that flies; Our science, on the other hand, crawls at ground level.” (2Cel 103; LM 11.2; EP 53).

Last Saturday I heard the story of a man who had prepared a speech about the worm. When the time came to give it, he discovered, to his dismay, that the topic was about the elephant. So that man said, “Notice that the elephant is a huge animal that has a trunk like a worm. And speaking of the worm, the worm is like this, like this, like that...”

Something similar happens to me. I prepared a talk on Franciscan Theology and in the program that was distributed to them it is announced as follows: “The way of doing theology in our house of studies”. I will simply tell you that our house of studies is Franciscan and in it Franciscan theology is done—or should be done.

1. Theology and history.

Theology has always been under the impact of history. In the 50 years of history of our Theologate, historical circumstances have caused the perception of FT to vary sharply. It would seem that it had been placed on a seesaw.

What was the theological climate of the Catholic Church when our Theologate was born?

In 1954 Thomism dominated. Since Scholasticism was restored in the late nineteenth century, “St. Thomas was followed as a ‘common doctor’ by most Catholic theologians. In addition to the officialized Thomism, other “Catholic Schools” continued to have some validity: the Molinist/Suarecian, in matters of predestination and grace;

the Carmelite, in spirituality; the Alfonsian, in moral theology”¹. The “Franciscan School” was present with a little more prestige for the breadth of its field of influence, for its antiquity and the originality of its teachers, for its doctrinal proposals and its presence in all the great problems.²

In this theological context, a new option began to emerge. At the end of World War II we began to speak of the “New Theology” (Nouvelle Théologie). The Magisterium and most of its theologians considered it a threat and sought in Scholasticism refuge and weapons to attack it..

The Second Vatican Council gave a new twist to the work of theology. The Church, situating herself

¹ A. de Villalmonete, *¿Es que necesitamos una teología franciscana?*, en *Estudios Franciscanos* 87 (1986) 695. The author has other works on Franciscan theology: *Anto- nio de Padua y la primera teología franciscana*, en *Estudios Franciscanos* 97 (1996) 379-403; *El giro antropocéntrico de la teología actual en la perspectiva del beato Juan Duns Escoto*, en: *Naturaleza y Gracia* XLI(1994): *Contribución de la teología franciscana a una teología del futuro*, en *Latentianum* 26 (1985) 702-755; *El “Mysterium Christi” del Vaticano II en Perspectiva escotista*, en *Naturaleza y Gracia* 13 (1966) 215-268. A veces aparece como “de Villalmonete” y a veces simplemente “Villalmonete”.

² The nomenclature “Franciscan theology” replaced — at least as far as theology/philosophy is concerned — to that of the “Scotist School”, in force for centuries: “The change of nomenclature could be due to the recognition that with Duns Scotus the theological/philosophical thought of the Franciscans would have reached its best development, in what it had of more specific and original. In the alternative, the conviction was expressed that the thought of Duns Scotus would be misunderstood if it was not framed within the doctrinal tradition of the Franciscan brotherhood.” (A. de Villalmonete, *o.c.*, 683, footnote number one).

beyond Scholasticism, she returned to the sources of faith, to Scripture and to Patristics. A new theological situation ensued. The so-called “Scholasticism” of Catholic theology began to be viewed with suspicion.³ Schools of thought were eclipsed. Opinion spread that they went against freedom and scientific objectivity and that they pigeonholed one into a style of thinking. Being in a school of thought meant taking a certain predetermined stance.⁴ When I studied theology, the eclipse of theological schools was at its height. I was formed in a common theology in which the common teacher was no longer St. Thomas. We lost sight of Franciscan theology (FT). When I was sent to study in Rome, I was not sent to our center of studies, the Antonianum, but to the Gregorian. Not only had FT been lost sight of, but it was also held in very low esteem within our own family. And this does not cease to surprise since with the Conciliar renewal the style (of FT) and many of its propositions jumped to the foreground.

2. Is it valid to continue talking about a Franciscan theology?

In this context, some Franciscan theologians began to question the very existence of FT.⁵ They wondered.: Can we

3. From the end of the Middle Ages religious groups and orders interested in the study of theology formed “Schools” around some of their most eminent doctors, whose teachings they undertook to follow. The Dominicans declared doctor of their Order st. Thomas Aquinas, the Carmelites John of Baconthorp (English Carmelite of the fourteenth century), the Augustinian hermits opted for Egidio Romano (1243-1316). The Franciscans proposed several doctors: Alexander of Hales, Richard of Mediavilla. But especially St. Bonaventure and Duns Scotus. The custom of grouping into schools continued during the scholastic Renaissance of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

4. One thing is the “scholasticism” (an extreme) and another thing is the “Schools”. Schools are inevitable. Christian theology starts from a certain position, as happens with Buddhist or Muslim theology. The rejection of the *Schools* nullifies the richness proper to the various theologies. This diversity of theology is present in the Gospels themselves.

1. For example, in Germany: Hermann Josef Lauter, *Franziskanische Theologie für unsere Zeit*, en *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 33 (1970) 1-5 and Justin Lang, *Gibt es heute eine franziskanische Theologie?*, en *Franziskanische Studien* 57 (1975) 37-46. In Italy: Giovanni Iammarrone, *Possibilità, senso e compiti di una “Teologia Franciscana” in sé e per il*

keep talking about FT? Hasn't it fallen under its own weight? There were things that seemed to validate these questions. Some of them.

○ The great Franciscan masters belong to *the period of Scholasticism*, and in theology after Vatican II there is a malaise with scholastic theology. But, in reality, this should not be an obstacle to curbing the FT. The challenge is to update our Franciscan tradition on the basis of the present cultural context.

○ One of the characteristics of the theology of our time is its *ecumenical character*. Therefore, talking about FT seems to reduce the horizon and prospects. But in reality, all theology moves within a tradition. Christian theology has its starting point in Jesus. The same can be said of other non-Christian theologies such as Buddhism, Islamism, Hinduism.

○ Finally, some saw the *new methodology* of theology as an obstacle.⁶ Advances in theology — así history reveals— depend, to a large extent, on the discovery of a new method to enter reality. When FT turns on the great medieval masters, it does not propose new methods. However, after such a long Thomistic predominance, FT appears as a new theology. Moreover, theology not only advances by seeking new methods, but also by interpreting and updating old methods. FT now has the task not only of re-

momento attuale, en *Miscellanea Franciscana* 78 (1978) 339-356. En España: A. de Villalmonete, *¿Es que necesitamos una teología franciscana?*, en *Estudios Franciscanos* 87 (1986) 683-718.

6 Among other things, we move from a theology of a juridical nature and controlled by authority to another of a historical nature and more independent of authority..

editing the works of the great Franciscan masters of the past, but to reinterpret their thought in a critical and creative way.

3. A new opportunity for FT.

Parallel to the loss of interest in FT, the post-conciliar period has paradoxically given it a unique opportunity. In fact, for decades there prevailed in Catholic theological circles a poorly concealed misgiving and suspicion of anything that was not the profession and strict observance of Thomism. The change produced in Vatican II oxygenated theology. “Only within this atmosphere of visible liberalization of Catholic theology could Pauls VI’s letter “Alma Parens” be written. In it J. Duns Scotus—his person, his theological-philosophical teaching—, achieves an honorary position next to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, “the princes of the Scholastic.” He himself is presented as “the bearer of the Franciscan School”, as the “teacher of the Seraphic Doctor”. “Those interested in Franciscan theology now have an unknown opportunity for the preferential and specific cultivation of this branch of theological knowledge, without those diffuse external pressures that might interfere with their task. Or dissuade it from the beginning”⁷. The letter *Alma Parens* (1966) we can add the beatification of Duns Scotus (1993) and the reliable critical editions of the great Franciscan masters.

That is why interest in the FT has picked up in recent years. FT chairs have been reestablished in some universities⁸ and

5. A. de Villalmonete, *o.c.*, 706.

6. The Franciscan Center of the Province “Ntra. Sra. de Guadalupe” of Central America, directed by Friar Pedro O’Neill, ofm, programmed a distance course in Franciscan theology: *Curso de Teología Franciscana*, “Juan Duns Escoto”. The inauguration took place on the 19th of February 2003, The Course will last 6 years and academic recognition is given by the University of the Jesuits, Rafael Landívar, in Guatemala. *Cátedra “San Buenaventura”*, endowed by the Provincial Ministers of the Franciscan Friars of Spain, attached to the Faculty of Theology and whose objective

a few months ago the book *Manual de Teología Franciscana* was published.⁹ We are returning to our roots, drinking from our own well. Of course, as we have said, we cannot limit ourselves to repeating a glorious past. It must be updated taking into account the new methods of theology (e.g., the critical historical method) and the current situation. “The reference to this glorious past must not become a necessity of archaeologists, nor remain a solemn and reverential repetition of the excellent doctrines which were then taught. What matters is knowing how to combine fidelity to the spirit of the initial creators, with the concerns and answers that are requested by the people of today.”¹⁰ FT has to evolve towards a new identity and a new growth.

If we stick to the testimony of history, when Franciscanism has been lived with intensity it has produced high theological contents. To the extent that the charism of St. Francis was lived with “originality, novelty, depth and fruitfulness, it naturally produced its correlative form: new theological contents that are highly esteemed.”¹¹ And the theology that emerged from this way of life in turn fertilized the life that had given birth to it. The cultivation of theology was not only a spontaneous action of the Franciscan masters, but was also a task imposed by the Church herself: “The Church was well aware of what she was doing when the Order of St. Francis, full of strength and religious enthusiasm, we would almost say imposed the cultivation of science, a certain standard of living, a certain degree of possession. Whoever sees in this a beginning of corruption of its primitive ideal shows that he has a partial perception of life and a serious ignorance of

is to make present in monographic courses the thought of Franciscan Theology at the Pontifical University of Salamanca (UPSA).

7. Work coordinated by José Antonio Merino y Francisco Martínez Fresneda. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid, 2003, 526 páginas.

8. A. de Villalmonete, *o.c.*, 687.

9. A. de Villalmonete, *o.c.*, 711.

of the essential conditions which require the promotion and development of every vigorous spirituality. On the contrary, with these wise norms the Church assured the Franciscan Order its survival and continued fruitfulness of action.”¹² To prevent the Franciscan lifestyle from becoming stagnant, it was necessary for it to crystallize into organized thinking. In this way it was transmitted to the new generations. We can see that Franciscanism is both a way of life and a way of thinking.¹³

1. What is FT.

We are talking about FT. What is it? FT is the translation, on an intellectual and doctrinal level, of the way of life of St. Francis and his Brothers. From the *forma vitae* (way of life) is born the *forma mentis* (way of thinking). In words attributed to St. Francis: “teach what you live and live what you teach.”

The *humus* of Franciscan theology is the form of life. E. Gilson wrote: “What St. Francis had only felt and lived, St. Bonaventure would ponder... The interior effusions of the Poverello were to develop into concepts.”¹⁴ Francis's lifestyle, his way of experiencing and living Christianity, are the founding moment and it's constant term of reference. But not everything is here. An Italian theologian has defined it this way: “Franciscan theology is a reading and confrontation with the socio-economic, spiritual, religious, etc., problems of a certain cultural context(s), carried out from within the Christian experience of faith, as lived by those who claim to be children and followers of Francis of Assisi.”¹⁵

10. R., Guardini, *El espíritu de la Liturgia*, Barcelona, 1946, 84.

11. “If the Franciscan charism wants to be lived and offered to people with all its force of conviction at the community and social level, it must be lived simultaneously as a *forma vitae* and as a *forma mentis*, which are completed and fertilized in perfect symbiosis.” (A. de Villalmonde, *o.c.*, 709).

12. E. Gilson, *La filosofía de san Buenaventura*, Buenos Aires, 1948, 73.

In this definition we find other essential elements of Franciscan Theology.

The Role of the Franciscan Family. It is the Franciscan Family that prolongs and actualizes the charism of Francis within the Church, society and the world. The whole tradition of the Franciscan Order, from the beginning to the present day—both theoretically and practically—is the place in which the Franciscan “way of life” has been preserved, updated and transmitted.

Places and times. FT has known various updates according to cultural climates and epochs.¹⁶ “FT has to be managed as a flowing historical-cultural reality, in continuous process and becoming. And this is it's being, it's nature. It makes its way by walking.”¹⁷ It is not, therefore, a simple chapter in the history of theology¹⁸

13. G. Iammarrone, *Possibilità, senso e compiti di una “Teologia Franciscana” in sé e per il momento attuale*, en: **Miscellanea Francescana** 78(1978)339-356. Cita en p. 344.

14. Although St. Anthony was the first to teach theology, historians think that the beginning of the Franciscan style of doing theology began four years after the death of St. Francis when Alexander of Hales, professor of theology in Paris, entered the Order of the Friars Minor, without abandoning his Chair. “In contact with the University and studies begins the Franciscan attempt to incarnate the spirit of St. Francis in the theological academic body. For this, he (Alexander of Hales) and succeeding Franciscan masters, will try to make a Theology that is prayer and a deeply theological prayer. They will show scientifically to the scientists of their time that creation and nature can also be contemplated with Franciscan eyes, as the symbol and gift of the Good God; they will fight so that reason and science are oriented towards faith and so that faith is a true servant of the human, but without unnecessary fissures and without any other rupture than those produced by the Crucified. Yes, the Crucified One is the center of this theology, which desires nothing but contemplation and transformation and which is therefore already a theology of the now, of urgency, of the present eschatology.” [M. Arias Reyero, *La escuela teológica franciscana*, en *Cuaderno Franciscanos de Renovación* 37(1977)19-32. The quote is on the page 21].

15. A. de Villalmonde, *o.c.*, 714.

16. It is the same thing that has happened with Christian theology: it has been updated throughout history. For example, Christianity, centered after Jesus' death on eyewitnesses, had to be Hellenized upon entering Greek culture. Similarly, Francis' lifestyle had to be clothed with scholasticism at a time dominated by this theological method..

2. Characteristics of Franciscan theology .

We could talk about the themes of Franciscan theology. In this talk I found it more appropriate to speak of the Franciscan style of doing theology. What characterizes Franciscan theologians “is not the defense of certain theses — which they did with a certain preference, although not too unanimously — but a certain way of thinking and evaluating certain aspects.”¹⁹ There is no “closed Franciscan theology... Its peculiarity lies not so much in doctrine as in a spirituality of its own. This is concretized in certain intellectual motives and ways of thinking, which structure and coin Franciscan theology. Much of this is also outside FT But there it did not constitute, or at least not in equal measure, a shaping element of theological thought.”²⁰ FT is, above all, *an orientation, a direction, a style of thinking* about Catholic theology.²¹

1st A *Catholic, dissident and marginal theology*. Being a fully Catholic theology it is a dissident theology and, therefore, marginal. At a time when almost the entire Catholic Church followed St. Thomas, the Franciscans had the privilege of being different while remaining Catholic. It was like the ferment in dough or salt that flavors food and preserves it from corruption²². But when theology

becomes Evangelical, Franciscan theology ceases to be marginal and is located at the center.²³ This is what happened at Vatican II.

2nd *Gospel-centered*. The essential characteristic of FT is its evangelism. At the time it was born there were two options: focus on philosophy or focus on sacred scripture. The Franciscan teachers did not hesitate: we must focus on the Gospel, *without this meaning a rejection of philosophical thinking*. And it is that a life according to the Gospel corresponds to a theology according to the Gospel. “This 'obvious' life starting from the Gospel is reflected above all in the fact that Francis admirably endorses the language of the Gospel and that his religious thought is essentially determined by biblical categories: his thought does not start so much from concepts as from facts belonging to the history of salvation, and his arguments are founded with an authentically biblical criterion.”²⁴ For this reason, St. Bonaventure was strongly opposed to mixing too much water of Aristotelian philosophy into the wine of theology. He sensed the danger of a theological reflection that allows itself to be influenced too much by the problems and solutions of human knowledge. This choice made FT more biblical than Thomism. We can see it even in Scotus.

19. W. Dettloff, *Teología franciscana*, en: H. Fries, *Conceptos fundamentales de la teología II*, (Cristiandad), Madrid 1979. 766-767.

20. Friedrich Wetter, *Teología de los franciscanos*, en *SM III*, 237.

21. Cf. A. de Villalmonete, *o.c.*, 718.

22. Friar Ignacio Larrañaga speaks of this marginalization of the Franciscan current: “The clerical formation, markedly rationalist, using logic and abstraction as almost unique sources of knowledge, had neglected for centuries, poetry and intuition, except in the Franciscan current, underestimating, to say the least, the emotional and imaginative aspect of the person.

Result? It can be assumed: a human, in a certain way, mutilated, with a void that is difficult to balance in the general architecture of the person.[I. Larrañaga. “El

Templo de la creación”, en *Vida Religiosa* 59 (1985) 277-283. Quote in p. 278. Vol. 59, # 9].

23. M. Arias Reyero notes the marginalization of Franciscan theology and the regrettable consequences. It was suspected of having been the cause of the heterodox movements that relied on certain interpretations of St. Augustine and wanted to neutralize them with a Thomistic interpretation that was incapable of understanding them and of dialoguing with them. A series of questions are asked: “Would it not have been possible to have a more fruitful dialogue between Protestantism and Catholicism, and between the latter and Modernity on the basis of a Franciscan Augustinianism? Could Protestantism not have freed itself from its extreme positions through dialogue with a Franciscan theology more homogeneous with it? and more able to understand it than the Thomistic essentialist line? Would modernity, based more and more on a concept of freedom, not have been more understood and challenged by the Franciscan spirit than by the Thomist? In any case, time has passed and hypotheses cannot fully recover the past. Maybe they will help us recover the future.” [M. Arias Reyero, *o.c.*, 26].

24. W. Dettloff, *o.c.*, 767.

Although his writings have more quotations from Aristotle than from the Bible and that he leads thought to an almost insurmountable abstraction, his problems and solutions have a theological foundation and aspect. “This peculiarity of Duns Scotus becomes quite clear if his theses are compared with those of Thomas Aquinas.”²⁵ Other characteristics emerge from FT's evangelism. We point out some of them below.

^{3rd} *Narrative*. It is narrative rather than speculative²⁶. Part of life, of facts, rather than of concepts. The Franciscan school finds strange the theology that ignores—or is even ashamed of—Jesus's way of speaking and arguing. The language and mentality of Jesus are normative for a Christian theology.

^{4th} *At the service of preaching*. Francis abandoned his initial resistance to the Brother's studies when he realized the need for adequate preparation for preaching: “Francis of Assisi, in spite of his distrust of the study of scientific theology, in which he saw a danger to *devotion*, had already recognized the need for his friars to have adequate formation for preaching.”²⁷ When preaching is not on the horizon of theology, there is a danger of withdrawing into itself—on purely theoretical questions—and distancing itself from the real life of the People of God. On the other hand, when it takes evangelization into account, it can reach a wider audience than the small group of specialists. It will be able not only to nourish the people with a word that can be understood, but it can also be enriched by the faith and life of believers²⁸.

^{5th} *Popular*. The Franciscan theologian takes time to be not only in the library and the classroom, but also close to the people, especially the poor and crucified people. This influences theology: in language, the selection of themes, in mindset. Closeness with people enables him to integrate the real problems of the people and not get lost in purely academic issues. Now, the popular mood is not at odds with serious study. We cannot settle for an elementary theological formation arguing that in popular environments there is not much intellectual demand. The popular mood of FT indicates rather a style of doing theology.

^{6th} *A prayerful theology*. FT doesn't just talk about God, but it talks to God. Let us recall Francis' letter to St. Anthony of Padua: “I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to your brothers, provided that, by reason of this study, you do not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion, as contained in the Rule.” Within its method, FT always leaves a place for prayer.²⁹ Franciscan theologians were very aware of the sentence of Evagrius Ponticus (345-399): “If you are a theologian, you will truly pray, and if you pray truly, you will be a theologian.”³⁰ For them, “the theologian is a person who prays about the truth, as it were; in him/her prayer is woven into truth.”³¹ “In emphasizing and privileging the contemplative nature over the analytical, speculative dimension, one does not try to ignore analytical work but to emphasize that analytical and speculative work—even the

25. W. Dettloff, *o.c.*, 768

26. Cf. A. Cacciotti, *Amore e conoscenza nel francescanesimo. Alcuni aspetti, Antonianum* 67 (1992) 327.

27. W. Dettloff, *o.c.*, 766.

28. To deepen this topic you can see: B. Monroy, *La teología evangélica medieval. Una teología al servicio de la evangelización*, en: *Espíritu y Vida* 8 (1995) 87-97.

29. Una hermosa biografía sobre santo Tomás cuenta que, mientras el santo escribía teología, “se puso de rodillas y sintió un impulso de su corazón, dulce e irresistible, que se deshacía en adoración... Enseguida, sin embargo, reaccionó. No podía permitirse tales deliquios amorosos durante el tiempo de trabajo. Así, pues, la pluma de ganso siguió deslizándose sobre el terso folio...” [Louis de Wohl, *La luz apacible*, (Ed Palabra), Madrid 1992, 206]. San Buenaventura integraba en sus escritos el impulso del corazón.

30. *De oratione* 60, P.G. 79, 1179. Citado por A. Barruffo, *Teología ed esperienza spirituale, Rivista di Scienza Religiose (RSR)* VII/1 (1993) 39.

31. A. Barruffo, *o.c.*, 39.

The most critical and acerbic of modern theology—ends naturally in practice, in the experience of love that is authentic praxis” (Duns Scotus).”³²

7th *Affective*. Theological study cannot be separated from contemplation of God “because God is known not only by intelligence, but also, and above all, by love.”³³ Therefore, FT is affective (the primacy of love). Scotus's Master, Gonsalvus Hispanus affirmed: “Love of God is the most necessary thing for the theologian. If the theologian does not arrive at charity, which is the aim of theology, theology will be for him not only idle but pernicious.”³⁴ The study of theology is a two-edged sword. It makes us better or it makes us worse. It can be for our good or for our evil. If it doesn't make us more cordial and loving instead of benefiting us, it hurts us. For the Franciscan School, the primacy is not knowing but loving³⁵. It is love that stimulates research. For this reason, Scotus placed theology among *the practical sciences*. In it there is *unity between knowledge, love and action*. It is a demand of St. Francis: “Genuine biblical is, in short, the unity of knowledge and action that Francis always demanded and made a reality in his life.”³⁶

8th *The beauty of language*. Theology speaks of God and from God. St. John writes: “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). And love is better expressed in a poetic discourse than in a

prosaic Discourse.³⁷ That is why Francis of Assisi was a poet and many of his followers have been (as well). This makes FT strive to speak of God in attractive language. “The polyvalence of literary art makes the 'found language' even richer in order to narrate the loving taste of the known faith.”³⁸

9th *Freedom of spirit*. Its evangelical nature explains to large part “why in the Franciscan Order no decision has ever been given that would oblige the theologians of the Order to maintain certain school of thought opinions, why the Franciscan theologians have always maintained freedom of spirit, especially in their heyday, and why authentic Franciscan theology can say something important even to the people of today, especially the Christian.”³⁹ However, the great freedom that has characterized Franciscanism can lead to negative attitudes. One of them is individualism. Without adequate community structures — such as study and research centers, dissemination bodies — efforts to introduce FT to people of today are diluted. They might be meritorious attempts on a personal level. Therefore, freedom must go hand in hand with fellowship. It is another characteristic of the FT.

10th *Brotherhood and studies*. I limit myself to explaining this characteristic of the FT with a story. Thomas of Celano tells us that Francis proposed to his brothers a parable. He said:

“A general chapter of all the religious in the Church is being held, And since there are literate and unilliterate, wise and those who without having knowledge know how to please God, a speech is commissioned to one of the wise and one of the simple. The wise man deliberates, as wiseman would, and thinks to himself: “There is no place to show off knowledge where there are perfect sages, nor is it right that, saying subtle things before such intelligent people,

32. A de Villalmonste, *o.c.*, 685

33. A. Barruffo, *o.c.*, 39.

34. B. Kloppenburg, *Natureza prática da teologia no pensamento escotista*, REB 211 (1993) 637. *Theologia non solum est sibi otiosa sed etiam perniciosa*. In general, this conviction exists in Franciscan theologians: “A theology without praxis is harmful and toxic. But for them, praxis in theology means love for God as a licit act of the will, naturally subsequent to intellection and, at the same time, according to an intellect that is rightly born of knowledge illuminated by Revelation” (B. Kloppenburg, *o.c.*, 638).

35. Cf. F. Wetter, *o.c.*, 238.

36. W. Dettloff, *o.c.*, 767

37. Cf. J. García, *Theologie et expression poetique*, en : *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 68/2 (1994) 173-196.

38. A. Cacciotti, *o.c.*, 327

39. W. Dettloff, *o.c.*, 770.

I stand out for my boasts. Perhaps you will get more fruit by speaking simply.”

"The appointed day dawns, the assembly of the saints meets, there is expectation to hear the speeches. The wise man comes forward, dressed in a sack, his head covered with ashes, and preaching more to the admiration of all with his composure, says with brevity of word: "Great things we have promised, greater things are promised to us; Let us keep these, let us sigh for them. The delight is brief; the penalty, perpetual; the suffering, little; The glory, infinite. Of many the vocation, of few the choice, for all the retribution". The listeners are moved and burst into tears and they venerate the true sage as a saint. The simple one says to himself: "The wise man has robbed me of all that I had decided to do and say. But I know what I must do. I know some verses of psalms; I will play the role of wise, since he has played the role of simple.”

"It's time for the next day's session. The simple one rises, proposes as theme the chosen psalm; and, impelled by the Spirit, he speaks so fervently, subtly and devoutly thanks to divine inspiration, that all, with astonishment, confess with conviction: "The Lord speaks with the simple" (2Cel 191).

Where is the wise man, where is the simple one? When theology is studied and done in brotherhood, the simple becomes wise and the wise becomes simple. There are no longer any distinctions.

11th *Joyful*. I don't understand why theology and the study of theology should be boring and tedious. The Franciscan School tells us that theology is not a bland science but a joyful one. In everything it is an arduous and sometimes strenuous work, therefor joy cannot be lacking. In the desert there is also beauty. It is an essential dimension of all authentic Christian and Franciscan theology. Theology has been defined as "science of

salvation" and salvation produces joy.⁴⁰ St. Bonaventure defined theology as "a tasty science, a *sapid science*." ⁴¹ If the study of the things of God does not produce joy, it no longer communicates salvation. In the experience of St. Francis, true joy *springs from the Cross* of Christ.

12th. *Positive attitude towards the things of the world*. Theology can be carried away by pessimism and theologians can become, in an expression of John XXIII's "prophets of misfortune". The theology that springs from St. Francis has a positive attitude towards the world because it knows how to find God in all things. "In the Canticle of brother sun, the saint greets the things of this world as his sisters. This Franciscan love of nature is not pure visionary imagination, but springs from the ability to encounter God in all things. This same attitude is also found in F.T., especially in the symbolic exemplarity of Bonaventure. Creation is a book in which, with the help of Scripture, we can know and encounter God."⁴²

In short, the FT is an *integral theology* "that uses and values all the enormous potential of the human condition. Thus, knowledge and love, before the ultimate fulfillment, 'narrate' the truth about God, about human persons and their neighbor, about their relationships."⁴³

Conclusion.

FT was born because some Franciscans felt the need to do it and they did it. If we don't feel the need to challenge this task, who will? Are we aware of the need to collect and update the theological patrimony of the rich Franciscan tradition? Do we do it? Do we want to do it?

40. R. Latourelle, *Teologia scienza della salvezza*, (Cit-tadella Editrice), Assisi 1980.

41. A. Nguyen Van Si, *La théologie de L'imitatio du Christ d'après Sain Bonaventure*, (Antonianum), Roma 1991, 18.

42. F. Wetter, *o.c.*, 240.

43. A. Cacciotti, *o.c.*, 328.

I know it's not an easy task, especially since it's born of a lifestyle. There are also other obstacles. History shows that FT has divided the Franciscans from the very beginning. Within the Order there have been times of hostility towards cultivation and cultivators of theological studies. For this reason, A. de Villalmonste thinks that the main obstacle for FT is the Franciscan family itself. It seems to me that the important thing is to check whether there are Franciscans who want to dedicate themselves to this task, decide to do it and receive the support of the brotherhood (and sisterhood). After 50 years of our Theologate (in Monterrey, NL Mexico), we can do something, however modest. I point out some tasks. Attendees can add others.

1. *Recover the style of the FT not to enter disputes with the other schools, but to serve the Church from our own charism. It's not about locking ourselves in a school. It is necessary to continue with a global theological formation but without neglecting our particular style of doing theology.*

2. *Include a FT workshop within the program where not only the thinking of the great Franciscan masters is exposed, but also the effort to update them. Do not study them as pieces of archaeology.⁴⁴*

3. *Publications.* Much has been written about St. Francis and his spirituality. We have abundant studies on his life, his spirit, the environment in which he lived, his prophetic-charismatic mission in the Church. However, the correlative theological reflection is rather poor.⁴⁵ In our Province we have this sin of omission.

44. It is necessary to apply current theological methods and apply the three steps of the theological method: introspective, retrospective and prospective.

45. In 1931 a Franciscan theologian, Bede Kleinschmidt, wrote: "Our scientific-literary activity, both in the publication of magazines and in the publication of books, is delayed." (A de Villalmonste, o.c., 688). The situation has not improved significantly. In Mexico we are far behind. The causes can be many: Francis' distrust of studies continues to weigh (on us),

4. *Work as a team.* One swallow does not make summer. My experience tells me that this is not easy. At least I have tried to do it — and will continue to do so — with those who are willing to do so.

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May 2023

Intellectual and structural mediocrity on our part, lack of teamwork.