



Ecumenical / Interfaith Committee

Walking Together

by Anne Mulqueen, OFS

*Ecumenical cooperation...remains essential,
and will surely bear fruit
in promoting peace and harmony
in a world that so often seems at risk
of fragmentation.*

*From Pope Benedict's State Visit to
the U.K. in September 2010
Meeting with Rowan Williams,
then Archbishop of Canterbury*

By the time this article is published in TAU-USA, we will have a new Supreme Pontiff or at least the process will have begun. So I didn't want this opportunity to go by without quoting Pope Benedict's 2010 comment on ecumenism.

In the last issue I mentioned that the next two articles would explore spiritual ecumenism and growing in communion. This article is devoted to spiritual ecumenism. The original decree, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, states, *This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement, and merits the name "spiritual ecumenism."*

The *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* defines spirituality as the attitudes, faith convictions, and practices which determine the lives of men and women. It is the Spirit-led way we behave before God. In essence, spirituality refers to a lifestyle under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In his book *That They All May Be One* Cardinal Walter Kasper wrote, ... *every spirituality must be questioned about the Spirit behind it, whether it is the Holy Spirit or the spirit of the world. Spirituality demands the*

discernment of spirits. Thus spirituality is not an exclusively emotional affair devoid of the question of truth; rather, it helps, enables and even compels us to seek the truth. An appeal to spirituality, therefore, does not mean a painless escape from theology. In order to remain healthy, spirituality demands theological reflection and theological discernment.

Reflection on these words will lead us to understand that spiritual ecumenism is not superficial or trivial. It has its roots planted firmly in the action of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual ecumenism begins with what unites us rather than what divides us. It takes spiritual maturity to enter into respectful dialogue with other Christian faiths. And spiritual ecumenism demands deep and sustained prayer and the firm conviction that the divine seed indwells **all** people. If these attitudes are present, respectful dialogue can proceed. Through respectful dialogue, trust and collaboration will emerge.

To help you understand how the Secular Franciscan Order has entered into spiritual ecumenism, I will quote from a document called *Elements of Franciscan Unity*, prepared by the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity. Although the OFS participates in this Committee, the Joint Committee operates as a separate entity and enjoys both spiritual and financial support from NAFRA. It is composed of two members from three orders: The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), the Third Order Society of St. Francis (TSSF) and the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans

(OEF). All three orders share equal responsibility for this Committee.

The first element the Joint Committee considers essential is **Baptism**.

Our Franciscan Orders understand that our Franciscan unity springs from our shared relationship with God through Holy Baptism. The waters of our birth in the name of the Triune God signify our unity in one baptism by one God. This unity through baptism is the underpinning for our shared worship and witness as Franciscans.

The second element is **Vocation**.

Our call to Franciscan vocation implies being conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ by means of the radical interior change that the Gospel defines as conversion – taking up our cross daily to follow Christ. Our particular vocation is to observe the Gospel by following the examples of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi.

The third element is **Charism**.

As Franciscans, we see in the life of St. Francis of Assisi these gifts of the Holy Spirit: Holy Poverty (humility), love and joy. Through our rules and through the individual and collective work of our Orders, we seek to manifest these gifts. In our unified emulation of Francis, we seek to express a life witness to poverty, love and joy.

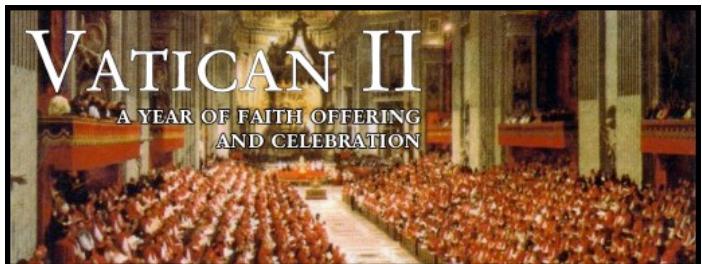
The fourth element is **Christ Centered**.

Franciscan spirituality is Christocentric to the extent that Francis fell in love with Jesus. This love transformed Francis' life. All that Francis did was shaped by what he saw in the Incarnation, and in the ministry and Passion of Jesus. Franciscan spirituality is a way of life that is centered on the person of Jesus. Our unified mission as Franciscans is to make Jesus known to all – and to pray and work for the reconciliation of all creation.

The fifth element is **Prophetic Voice**.

Fundamental to Franciscan spirituality is a commitment to strive for justice and peace among all people – and to affirm the inter-relationship and holiness of all creation. In a world torn asunder by conflict, divisions, intolerance and

exploitation, our unified prophetic witness is an expression of God's light in a dark planet. In our shared understanding of the spirit of Francis, we are called: to courageous initiatives in the field of peace making and justice, to make definite choices in harmony with our faith whenever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression, violence or indifference, and to protect and restore all of creation.



In conclusion, at the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII spoke of a new Pentecost. From its very beginning ecumenism was a spiritual phenomenon. And when areas of agreement can be reached, we consider it a gift and a grace from the Holy Spirit. Jesus prayed that all may be one so that the world may believe (John 17:21). Therefore, spiritual ecumenism must be inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. The world will come to believe in the One sent by the Father to be our Brother and who offers us life everlasting when they see us engaging in respectful dialogue.

Elements of Franciscan Unity

- Baptism**
- Vocation**
- Charism**
- Christ Centered**
- Prophetic Voice**