



FORMATION COMMISSION

PEOPLE OF THE WORD

by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS

Blessings to all dear sisters and brothers, and many thanks for all your prayer and support during the six years you allowed me to serve as your National Formation Chair.

This past October, I had planned to give my last formation session at our 2014 National Chapter, but unfortunately needs at home prevented me from attending.

I had planned to speak on the great blessing we have received by being called to be both People of Eucharist and, as Franciscans, also People of the Word. Our Rule of Life entrusts us with the great privilege of carrying the Word of God to all. We are also challenged to understand what is being spoken to us and to transform ourselves into “little” words of the Father. The path has already been modeled for us by Francis and Clare and countless of Franciscans before us. What an Honor! What a legacy! What a challenge, to become “alter-Christus”.

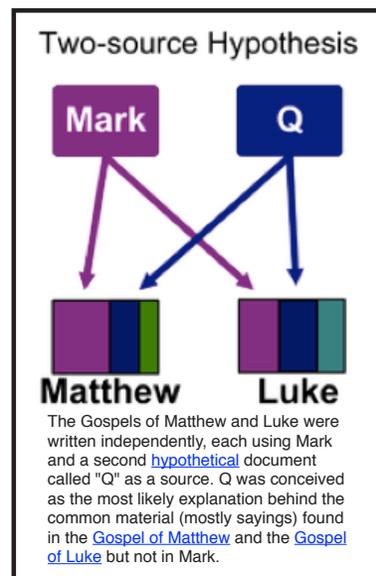
We are all familiar with the Gospels, the words spoken by Jesus, along with the evangelists’ additions and commentary that the specific communities being introduced to Jesus needed. Matthew, for example, follows a tradition needed by Jewish Christians, arranging his witness in a five-book pattern similar to the Torah. Luke pursues a path that highlights the important moments of faith among the little ones in society — women and also the poor and sick. Both Matthew and Luke took Jesus’ words and tailored them to meet specific needs, but the common foundation is the sayings themselves, the words of the Word.

This foundation is known as the Q document. Q for *quelle* or the “source”. We don’t know whether it was once a written collection or an oral tradition passed from one Christian community to the next, most likely in the preaching and stories from the Apostles as they shared their lived experience of Jesus.

Q sayings from Matthew and Luke are the common materials in both the Gospels, which were written independently, but share so much similarity.

So why am I going there? The Gospels are a tremendous treasury of what is important in our lives and much needed within our society, but we as People of the Gospel need to enrich ourselves, not just with how Matthew and Luke interpreted Jesus words, but how

Jesus words speak to us today. What is the commentary we write to explain and introduce Jesus to the world today?



In my travels to many local fraternities, I have been amazed at how well we understand the Gospels as a set of behaviors, a newly updated Ten Commandments,,. Certainly the Gospels do emphasize a specific approach to living life based on the way of love, love freely expressed and given for others. A life based on compassion, forgiveness and gifting ourselves to relieve

the pains of our sisters and brothers. A life counter to the world, one not based on using others for our own gain, hoarding, or being greedy and cheap with our time and presence, as if we have placed a buy/sell price on human worth.

But what I see, as either overlooked or not seen at all, is that the Gospels are not just about how to live life, they are about how God Incarnate lives life. They tell us who God is in His very essence, and not who we prefer Him to be. Jesus is the blueprint or master plan for all creation. The Gospels introduce Him and the Father to us. The Life of Jesus and the Gospels are how we know the very Nature (essence) of God. We no longer see Him only in a burning bush or a shadow passing by. Now we know with certainty, and no matter how hard we try, the Gospels are NOT about us, they are about the One we profess to follow and into whom we seek to transform ourselves.

So back to Q (*Quelle*)! The words of Jesus! For ease, consider reading from a red-letter version of the Gospels, focusing only on the red letters. This is easier on computer because you can extract the red letter sayings and then journal and pray with them., Then YOU can arrange them and YOU fill in the needed commentary for today as both Matthew and Luke once did. Then

you can begin to write your own “good news” for today and begin to introduce Jesus to all you meet —. Jesus brought to life now, today, in your own words and, more important, your actions.

It’s a bit of work, but it’s what all of us Franciscans professed that we want, To Observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot give what we don’t have or be what we don’t understand. As a possible personal ongoing formation and also possibly reinforced by fraternities, we might begin this journey into the words and therefore the mind of God. Formation and transformation at their fundamental core are the personal responsibility of each professed member, for life.

The Q-sayings or red letter editions give us the opportunity to hear and reflect on the sayings of Jesus without the evangelists’ commentary. The context added by Matthew and Luke add insight on how Jesus’ words were introduced to various communities and situations within their developing communities. Important yes! They can help us see how it mattered then, and how we can better evangelize the world in a way that can be heard Today.

Jesus’ words themselves can be quite forceful and even severe or shocking, so be prepared for a jolt! I would caution all of us at this point with the words of a Jesuit mentor I had the joy of some study with, Fr. John Powell, SJ. (paraphrased): The Gospel is meant to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. So if you are comfortable in are hearing the Gospel, you are probably not listening to the Gospel.

If, however; you desire to transform yourself into a part of the living Gospel, much like Francis, take the time, shut off the TV and go into your closet with the words of Jesus. Pray with them, play with them, taste their sweetness, let them fill you very soul. Then you will find the right words to write your own Gospel and proclaim the wonders God is constantly doing for you.

Make the Gospel your own and share it to the glory of the Father who richly blesses us.

Begin in thanksgiving, as urged by Bl. Solanus Casey, OFM Cap, again paraphrased — Thank God in advance for the wonders and blessings He will do for you.

I urge you to make the effort and take the path less taken and become truly People of the Word!

Peace, blessings and all good,

Fitz

Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS

National Formation Commission 2015



Pictured above are the four members of the National Formation Commission: Diane Menditto, OFS from Our Lady of the Angels Region in New Jersey; Patti Reynolds, OFS from Divine Mercy Region, Michigan; Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS (National Formation Director) from Santa Maria de Los Montañas Region, Colorado; and Anne Mulqueen, OFS from St. Margaret of Cortona Region, Maryland.

To provide a smooth transition for the new formation team, Bob Fitzsimmons, the previous National Formation Director, met with the group offering invaluable information and guidance to help clarify the vision for the Commission, and its mission within the Order.

Our initial plans for this year are to begin building and forming those strong relationships. The NEC has challenged the commission to prepare a formation workshop in 2015. Plans are underway for a centrally located formation director’s workshop in late August. We are also working to provide email communication by revitalizing the NAFRA-FORM. It is a beginning and we welcome your questions and input. We share with you the theme that developed over our weekend together: When we understand relationship, and how to be in a relationship, we will “be who we say we are”, following Jesus just like Francis.

*Peace and All Good,
Mary Anne Lenzi, OFS
National Formation Commission*