

# Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

## Theological Reflection: A Process for On Going Formation

By Pat Brandwein-Ball, SFO  
patball76@yahoo.com

The initial emphasis of JPIC grounds us in an examination of our Rule and General Constitution. Recall that the Constitution gives flesh to the meaning of the day to day manifestation of our life as a penitent. The penitential life draws us ever more deeply into union with God by His grace and our conversion - turning from the ways of the world to the ways of a Gospel life. Jesus, the Incarnate Word of the Father, entered human history to make known the way to the Father.

Our Rule comes out of the Vatican II Council. But...all of the laity are called to conversion and evangelization: acting from grace to bring Christ into the world directly. This takes many forms and each of us is gifted in diverse ways. All of our gifts are necessary to build up the Kingdom already begun in this life. Our particular *penitential way* draws us by Profession into the life and mission of the Church more intimately.

There are many issues in our time that require careful examination and an authentic Catholic/Franciscan response. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) speaks to these issues. Our common sense in the light of faith is appalled by recent greed and violence to name but a few areas that beg our attention. There are ways to effectively review and evaluate our response. One such way is Theological Reflection. JPIC encourages all fraternities frequently to incorporate this style of ongoing formation in regard to the questions of our time.

### Theological Reflection

- I. **Preparation:** A well prepared reflective session is essential. What specific social issue/question are you pondering? Write it out; name it. Gather background material, i.e.: What does the USCCB say about this issue? Does the Catechism of the Catholic Church deal with this issue? Does Vatican II address this? What does our Rule and Constitution express? Etc. Make sure there is a review of materials ahead of time by the planners and that the resources are available for study by the fraternity.

- II. **Personal experience:** Begin the session with an introduction of the issue to be explored, then give time for the individual to pause to think about his/her own experience of life that may bear on the topic. If the issue is given to the fraternity ahead of time, give time for the members to “re-collect” their thoughts. Does any of my culture play a role in how I think about this issue? For example, I grew up in the Midwest; is this reflected in how I view issues in New England? You may come up with your own examples of culture on its many levels. Go beyond the obvious. Reflect in terms of your religious tradition. Again, go beyond the obvious!

- III. **Mutual Conversation:** Use group discussion and group review of the supporting materials. This may be handled in smaller groups for a large fraternity. Mutual invitation is a great way to begin the session. The RESPECT guidelines also may enhance the reflection time. When this phase is done well it inspires creative thinking and leads to transformation of the person.

- IV. **Transformative Action:** What flows from mutual conversation becomes the “lens” we use for setting a course of action. Some examples are: “It appears we function as agents to Christify the world when...” Or “Our neighborhood has need of...” We are motivated by our charism to...” Etc. Look at the resources available, people, talent, time, and of course funds. I’m confident you will come up with your own list of resources.

- V. **Evaluate:** Once the plan is implemented, it is essential to evaluate it. Are we true to our Rule and the Church’s teaching? Did we meet the needs of others as intended or did we impose on them our need to do something? How is God calling me now? Begin the reflective process again.

Like anything new, Theological Reflection takes more time in the beginning. More than one fraternity gathering may be required to complete the process or you may come together for an entire day or weekend. The possibilities are open. Many issues may be reflected upon, in this manner, with your fraternity. If used on a regular basis, Theological Reflection can be a tool that opens the door to integrating the Rule in ways never imagined.

Resource: Theological Reflection for Transformation, prepared by Dianna Bergant, CSA; Faustina M. Crus, SM; Kathleen Dorsey-Bellow; Bernard J. Lee, SM; Maureen R. O’Brien, The Center for the Study of Religious Life, Chicago, IL, 2004