



A CASE OF CONSCIENCE

J.R. Guillent Pérez

The complete documentation of a
major spiritual event of our times

A Case of CONSCIENCE

Documentation and Essay

J. R. GUILLENT PEREZ

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appeared in Italian in Jerusalem in 1982 under the title

UN CASO DI COSCIENZA

With a reflection on its significance, universality
and transcendence

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TO THE READER

Herein is being offered to the public a *Documentation* that appeared in Jerusalem in May of 1982 under the Italian title *Un Caso di Coscienza* concerning the incompatibility of two states of consciousness that had arisen, over a number of years, between three Catholic Franciscan priests of the Custody of the Holy Land and said institution, and which culminated in the decision of the three friars to leave the institution to which they belonged. This publication of the *Documentation* is accompanied by an *Essay*, a focusing on “the awakening of consciousness in the man of today”, which I have made with the purpose of pointing out the universal and transcendent reach of this event and of the principles that brought it about. As an *Introduction* to the documentation, I have written a brief description of some of the outstanding aspects in relation to the protagonists of this “case of conscience”. I have also added *Personal Reflections* on certain points of some of the documents. The *Final Considerations* constitute a synthesis of what I have affirmed throughout the book.

This book originally appeared in Spanish with the title *Un Caso de Conciencia en Jerusalem 1982*. In this present English edition, unlike the first Spanish edition, the docu-

ments have been kept in their original chronological order in accordance with the publication made in Jerusalem. In order to facilitate its reading, the *Documentation* has been subdivided into nine parts, and each part has been given a title that highlights its principal content.

Un Caso di Coscienza is a compilation of documents, photostatically reproduced, that covers the period from June 27, 1969 to April 9, 1982, dates that mark the beginning and the end of the drama enacted. The documents, made public by the three friars, are prefaced by a *Presentation* written by them, and are interlaced by a *Chronicle* that serves as a guiding thread in the sequence of events. The *Documentation*, which appeared originally in Italian with the exception of a few documents in Spanish, is here translated for the first time into English.

The purpose of *Un Caso di Coscienza* was to make known with total objectivity – in the setting where the events had unfolded, and especially in the milieu of the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land – the circumstances, motives, and significance of the decision made by the three friars out of fidelity to conscience.

Through the *Documentation* one can become aware of the fact that the break between the three friars and the Institution deepens as both sides come to an ever clearer consciousness of the conflict between the principles that separate them. We find ourselves facing two incompatible states of consciousness: on the one side, the coming-to-consciousness of the three friars, according to which living the Gospel – the essence of the Franciscan ideal – consists in a total, unconditional, and direct surrender to the Will of God through the denial of self, which necessarily implies transcending the Institution as such; on the other side, the state of conscious-

ness of those who, identifying with the interests of the Institution, reaffirm the necessity of its mediation in man's relations with God.

It is well to point out, at the outset, that this coming-to-consciousness in the three friars was brought about by their encounter with a reality of a higher order, a "word" that presents itself as a *message* of the Being to the men of today so that they may come to the full consciousness of what their absolute Reality is. It was precisely their coming-to-consciousness through this Message that produced such a radical change in the lives of the three friars. Through this Message and their frequent contacts with the person who receives it – making it her life – the three friars were gradually becoming aware of the real necessity to take up completely what is proposed by the word of Jesus Christ. That is to say, the friars make the most unusual discovery: the only way to preach the Gospel was, and is, to live the Gospel, renouncing all compromises with the interests of the world. This is the crux of their difference with the Institution, which depends instead on the interests of the world.

The friars, before coming to understand the Message, saw no conflict between *living* the Gospel and remaining in the Institution. As for the ecclesiastical authorities, they were no doubt taken by surprise, since it must have seemed incomprehensible to them that they were actually being presented with a petition for "freedom" in order to live the Gospel. This initial surprise would gradually turn into frank hostility. The friars wanted to act as they had been doing all along, that is, within the established canons of respect and submission to the authority; but in the end, they realized that what they were requesting was incompatible with the aims and purposes of the Institution. They finally decided to leave the Custody of the

Holy Land, and they sought outside of it the fulfillment of the ideal that was captivating them, that of being faithful to the Gospel, unconditionally submitting their liberty to the Will of the Father.

As subjects obedient to the authorities of the Order, it can be said that they exhausted all the possible means for reconciling their *coming-to-consciousness* with the established order within which they had lived until that moment. They knock on every door through personal conversations and through an exchange of letters with all the ecclesiastical hierarchy; they address themselves to their immediate authorities, the Father Custos and the Discretorium of the Holy Land, to the Visitor and President of the Custodial Chapter, to the Minister General of the Order, and to the Pope. They wanted all their brothers in the faith to share this *gift* which the Being was sending to them through the Message and its bearer.

The reasons adduced by the three Franciscans not only serve as a point of reference for us to discover the absurdity of the institutionalization of the authentic messages of the Being, but they also offer us a lucid answer to the historical-spiritual crisis that the man of our day suffers.

The Message that awakened the consciousness of the three Franciscans speaks to the man of today, to the entire species, so that man may decide to acknowledge the preeminence of the Being, making it his life.

Part One

**THE AWAKENING OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE
MAN OF TODAY**

ESSAY

I

MY ENCOUNTER WITH A MESSAGE OF THE BEING AND WITH *UN CASO DI COSCIENZA*

In May of 1982, a *Documentation* published in Jerusalem, Israel, came into my hands. This publication, *Un Caso di Coscienza*, offered the entire documentation concerning the *coming-to-consciousness* of three Franciscan friars of the Custody of the Holy Land, with whom I have had the opportunity of becoming well acquainted. The last document reveals the firm decision of the three friars to leave the Order to which they had belonged for several decades. Here is the plain and simple fact: three religious priests of the Roman Catholic Church leave this Institution.

From the very moment I had the publication in my hands, I realized the extraordinariness and transcendency of the event. At first glance, this event could be taken as just one more case, among the many that occur daily, of one or more religious leaving the Orders to which they belonged. I quickly realized, however, that what was being staged here was one of the most singular events of this 20th century. What the three friars call *a case of conscience* was a bringing to light the disqualification of *all* that previous humanity has been – the “old man” – and at the same time, the friars were offering us the only valid way out, in the face of the historical and spiritual crisis we live today: the way of *total, unconditional, direct* surrender to the Being.

I was deeply moved by this *coming-to-consciousness*, and one of the things that most surprised me was the fact that it should be precisely religious belonging to the Roman Catholic Church who have such a profound lucidity and, at the same time, that this lucidity should have led them to make such a resolute decision as was that of taking a leap into the void. The more I entered into the details of the drama that had been enacted between the three religious and the Custody of the Holy Land, the more I became convinced that this *event* had to be launched to the four winds, divulged in all corners of the planet. The more I read the publication, the more I was discovering within me a profound affinity with the three religious. I have never belonged to a confessional faith, nor have I felt bound to any doctrine. The awareness that *I am nothing* has freed me from belonging to any group or institution. Now then, the three friars, already in the full maturity of their lives, were coming to a conviction similar to my own. I immediately felt that I had to put all my efforts into widely diffusing this *decision* of the three friars. I have always been a loner. Well then, the Being was now offering me the opportunity of living a life in common, based on the assumptions that have always inspired my life: the fact that this *I* that I am is nothing, and that the assuming of this nothingness is the only path for discovering the definitive essence of man – the Truth of the Being.

I have traveled many paths. I have been passionately fond of Buddhism, of Taoism, of the pre-Socratics. I have been deeply interested in Krishnamurti. The teachings of *Don Juan* of Carlos Castaneda have had a great impact on me. In these last few years I have let myself be fascinated by Christian mysticism: Meister Eckhart, Francis of Assisi, John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila. I made all these encounters guided

by the perspective of the ontological difference, taken from Martin Heidegger, according to which man's absolute truth is his real identification with the Being. It was this identification with the Being, this clarity about the fact that the Being is ineffable, that freed me from adhering to any system, from belonging to any organization. In all my wanderings through the great mysticism, I have found the same common denominator: the conviction that the *I* is nothing, and alongside this nothingness, it is revealed that the true essence of the *I* is the Being. I have also had the good fortune of having existentially identified myself with the movement of the *absurd*. I understood that the absurd was not a chance movement, just another literary trend, but precisely the culmination of twenty-five centuries of this Western culture. In the literature of the absurd, the failure of rationality is clearly shown; no longer is it a failure reserved to the intellect alone – to the academic – but applies as well to our ordinary living. With the absurd, the disqualification of reason penetrates even to the minute details of our everyday lives. It has always surprised me that in this Western culture those responsible in the arts, in science, and in thought in general, have not seen what the movement of the absurd has really represented.

In the last four years I have taken an interest in a Message in which the Being reveals Himself through a specific person, through Josefina Chacín, *the slave of the Lord*. Although it is in fact a matter of a *message*, what is most singular and unusual about this Message is that it reformulates and restates, with new words and in an even more eloquent manner, that the essence of man is the nothingness, and that this nothingness, or leap into the void, is the only legitimate path toward the house of the Being.

“The ‘Nothingness’ is what is closest to the Being

*and is what we are:
we are 'Nothing.'*
*The 'Nothingness' is beyond thought,
it is above understanding.*
*Therefore, it is not reached through knowledge,
but through 'renunciation'.*
*In order to reach the Being
one must take a leap into the void,
this 'void' is the 'Nothingness'."*

The foregoing quotation is taken from one of the books of the Message. As is easy to note, there is no essential difference between this Message and the great mysticism. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that this Message befits the man of today: it is precisely the call that the Being Himself makes to the men of this age so that they may come to *consciousness* of Him.

My progressively deeper involvement in the Message is due to the fact that I have found expressed there the profound motivation that has accompanied me for more than three decades. But the Message represents for me not just the possibility of sharing a doctrine, an intellectual position, but it has also presented itself to me as the most concrete and attainable opportunity for putting into practice what for many years has been the main content of my classes and lectures and of my books. Until just a few years ago, I felt that my dedication to Philosophy, my identification with the nothingness and with the Being had to be translated and made concrete in the simplest acts of my everyday living; nevertheless there was a duality in me: on the one hand, a deep interest in the themes of the nothingness and of the Being, an interest that was shaking the foundations of my life; on the other hand, however, I noticed that apart from the moments in

which I was engaged in the themes of the Being and the nothingness, I was a prisoner of the conditionings of this essentially self-worshiping society. Despite the fact that I had likewise attained a great intellectual clarity about what the *I* is, it is true that all this knowledge remained nothing but pure theory. Now then, the attraction that the Message had for me was that I saw in it the possibility of *making a life* of what I had so often talked about. What most captivated me about the Message was the fact that in the people whom I knew to be identified with *it*, there was real correspondence between their words and their deeds. Not that these people had already reached perfection, but they certainly had in them the firm purpose of being faithful to their surrender, to their self-denial. Above all when one knows close at hand the person who has received the Message, one can come to realize how completely faithful she is to this total, unconditional, and unrestricted surrender to the Being..., the knowledge I have accumulated about them in the course of my existence is becoming an actual reality.

As one can see, it was not for superficial reasons but for substantial ones that an interest has been awakened in me by *A Case of Conscience*. For me, it was a living example of fidelity to and consistency with what we believe we are called *to be*. What is most valuable about *A Case of Conscience* is precisely its fidelity, a fidelity that entails not only the risk of breaking with the institution within which one had lived one's life, but also running the risk of the most spectacular adventure that can fall to a human being: to disidentify with himself and to place himself totally and unconditionally in the hands of the Unknown – of the Being.

Just as my encounter with the Message has represented in my life the possibility of beginning to put into practice what

I have always proclaimed – the ontological difference – something similar also happened in the three friars; for what is most significant about this Message is that it makes us feel the inner necessity of translating into deeds what we discover to be the Truth: in simple terms, it teaches us to be faithful. Their encounter with the Message led the three friars to the profound conviction that the Gospel and the message of Francis were to be actually lived. It is not that the friars discover anything new, and yet they discover what is most novel: that the only thing that legitimizes a human life, the only thing that makes it authentic, is the correspondence between what one believes oneself to be and what one actually is. Today the Gospel is dead letter in the Roman Catholic Institution and in the other religious institutions that take cover under the name of Christ, with the exception of individuals who, even though in the Institution, are indeed truly committed to Christ.

The decision of the three priests to break with the Institution represents today an act of ransom, since Christ—the activity of the Divine in man – needs to be ransomed together with Jesus Christ from His false administrators.¹ The institutions that take cover under the name of Christ do not really represent Him. It would seem that with these three Franciscans the drama of Francis of Assisi at the foot of the crucifix of St. Damian is re-enacted: “*Repair my Church which threatens to crumble* “. It would seem as if today Jesus Christ through the Message had spoken to the three friars: Liberate my Church – the souls who are prisoners in the Institution.

The Gospel as *message* of salvation requires a total and complete surrender, as it is written: “*No one can serve two masters*” (Mt 6:24), that is to say, in order to be faithful to the Gospel – the very thing that Francis of Assisi cried out to his

contemporaries – it is necessary to disown the world, the ego, the attachment to creatures, and let only the love of the Being shine forth. Now then, the Roman Catholic Institution and the other Christian institutions have created a business between the Gospel and the world, and the balance has tilted mainly in favor of the world. “*Take these things away, and do not make the house of my Father a house of business*” (Jn 2:17). The awakening of the three friars, their coming-to-consciousness, consisted precisely in the fact that in the innermost depths of their being they felt the *call of fidelity* and true surrender to what had been taught them as doctrine of Truth from their infancy.

II

THE COMING-TO-CONSCIOUSNESS OF THREE FRANCISCANS BY VIRTUE OF THEIR ENCOUNTER WITH THE MESSAGE AND WITH THE PERSON WHO RECEIVES IT

The three friars who broke with the Order and left the Custody of the Holy Land are: José Barriuso, Raffaele Angelisanti and Giuseppe Napoli.

José Barriuso was born on April 13, 1921, in Corralejo de Valdelucio, Burgos, Spain. He studied Philosophy and Theology at the Franciscan Seminary of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. He was ordained a priest in 1945. He entered the Custody of the Holy Land in 1948, where he fulfilled the following functions: responsible in Jerusalem for the editing and publishing of the magazine *Tierra Santa*; spiritual guide for pilgrims from 1955-1971; Discret of the Holy Land, 1959-1962; responsible for the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem, 1975-1981. He wrote the booklet *Sal de ella, pueblo mío* [Come out of her, my people], *Tipografía Hispano-Arábica del Arzobispado de Tánger*, Tangier, 1970. He was in charge of the presentation and publication of all the books of the Message prior to *The "New Earth"*. Departure from the Institution, May of 1982.

Raffaele Angelisanti was born on November 10, 1922, in Ferentino, province of Frosinone, Italy. He did his studies in Philosophy and Theology in the Custody of the Holy Land; he was ordained a priest in Bethlehem in 1948; graduate studies in Philosophy in Rome, Italy, in 1949-1952; doctorate in

Philosophy with the thesis: *De problemate existentiae Dei apud Ibn Rochd (Averroes)*, Jerusalem, 1956. Professor of Philosophy and Literature at the Seminary of the Custody of the Holy Land, in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, 1953-1979; Discret of the Holy Land, 1969-1977; Acting Custos for alternate periods of different duration, approximately ten times between 1969-1978. He was in charge of the publication and presentation of the book *The "New Earth"*. Departure from the Institution, May of 1982.

Giuseppe (Giacinto) Napoli was born in Grotte, Agrigento, Italy, on April 25, 1938. He entered the Custody of the Holy Land at the age of thirteen; he was ordained a priest in 1961. He completed his graduate studies in Philosophy in Rome; doctoral thesis: *De mundi initio apud al-Kindi respectu probationis existentiae Dei*. Professor of General Philosophy and Islamic Philosophy in the seminaries of Bethlehem and Jerusalem; professor of Islamic Theology at the "Studium Biblicum Franciscanum" of the Flagellation in Jerusalem. Guardian of the Franciscan Monastery of Bethlehem, 1974-1977; Principal of the "Terra Sancta High School" in Jaffa. In 1979 he resigned this position as Principal in order to carry out the spiritual experience of which the documents speak. He leaves the Institution in May of 1982.

From the foregoing, it is to be noted that the three friars who left the religious Institution to which they belonged were conspicuous figures of outstanding prestige in the Custody of the Holy Land. We are therefore dealing with men in the full maturity of their lives who were well settled in an established order. This means that such a decisive step as the one they took – that of breaking with vested interests – must have had a more profound and appealing motivation than all the accumulated assets and attractions and security that the

advantages of a life, by now practically realized, could offer them.

How was this awakening of the three friars possible within the dormant institutionalized life in which they had abided, two of them for more than four decades and the third for close to thirty years? The event that led the three friars to come to full consciousness of the inauthentic living of the Gospel in the Institution was their encounter with a Message that came from across the seas, from the remote lands of Latin America, specifically from Venezuela. The bearer of the Message was a woman, a Venezuelan, *the slave of the Lord*, very ordinary in appearance and, moreover, lacking all academic credentials or previous specialized learning.

In what does this Message consist? To begin, the Message is a *message*. Does it make any sense, at this late stage of history, to speak of messages, of truths revealed by the Eternal? Even more so, does it make any sense today, at this stage of historical times, to ask oneself about the Eternal, about the Absolute? Of course the question is directly related to the one who poses it. For a human entity who is established, installed in the interests of the world, even in the best of cases, the question about the Being is devoid of real meaning. To ask ourselves about the Being, to begin our search for Him, we must have been already struck in some way by the arrow of the Being. In order to hear this call, we must in some way be outside the interests of the world, beyond mere human understandings. Finally, in order to open ourselves to the Truth of the Being, it is indispensable that we be disposed to run the greatest of all risks. The question about the Being is, in principle, within reach of all men, but actually only within the reach of those who have foreseen or intuited the necessity of renouncing the human. In order to undertake

the search for the Being, it is indispensable for us to begin to abandon the criterion of rationality and to initiate the renunciation of our own will. These requisites are common to the doctrines of the great mystics.

The doctrine of a Buddha, of a Lao Tzu, of a Jesus Christ makes sense and has validity only if one fully admits the possibility that man can communicate with the Transcendent. It is completely incomprehensible that such a lucid and profound work – and so revealing of the totality of the real – as is the *Tao Te Ching*, could come from the brain of Lao Tzu. One immediately understands that what Lao Tzu is telling us therein had to come to him from the Tao. It is the Tao who speaks in the *Tao Te Ching* through His messenger Lao Tzu. Similarly, in the *Diamond Sutra* of Buddha, the one who speaks is not the man Gautama but the Dharma. Likewise in Jesus, it is the Father who speaks. “*My teaching is not my own, but his who sent me*” (On 7:16).

It is not a question of convincing anyone about the validity of this Message, any more than it is a question of convincing anyone about those messages that history has already made sacred. It is a question of being or not being receptive to the fact that the Being does actually communicate with man. As for me, today, I have no doubts about this. As to this Message as well as those of Buddha, Jesus Christ, Lao Tzu, I have no doubt that there actually occurs in them a real and authentic communication between man and the Absolute. Furthermore, I consider that it is with such a receptivity, and starting from this encounter with the Eternal, that the man of today will be able to find the way to overcome the historical and spiritual crisis he is facing today.

With those who still seek explanations and criteria of certitude, on the basis of reason, in order to validate an

experience of the Being, dialogue is impossible. One only discovers that a real communication with the Being occurred in Gautama and in Jesus when a similar opening up has taken place, at least incipiently, in our very selves. Here the principle applies that like is known by like. For me, moreover, an absolute criterion of certitude that a real communication with the Being takes place in Gautama, in Jesus, in Lao Tzu, and today in Josefina, *the slave of the Lord*, is the exemplary way they live their lives. It is truly moving to read a sutra of Buddha or a sermon of Jesus Christ and at the same time feel that the word of these great Masters fully and totally corresponds to what they are in their everyday lives; that is to say, Jesus Christ and Buddha were living examples of what they preached. The testimony of their lives is the most evident proof of the fact that the Being truly *is*. How can we, in fact, explain to ourselves the life that these men led, with such a radical surrender, if they were not actually in communication with That with which they say they have communicated? The same applies to this Message and to the instrument who receives it. Those of us who are closely acquainted with *the slave of the Lord*, who have had the opportunity of living in community with her, have been able to verify that in her, too, is given a fully-tested fidelity to what she has received in the Message. As she is accustomed to saying, she is surrendered in a total and unconditional manner to the Being.

The *message* cannot be dissociated from the person who serves as intermediary. History teaches us that fidelity to the Truth received – this exemplary mark of the Master – is a most vital, indispensable component of the message itself. By this we are not insinuating that the Masters ought to be adored and treated as if they were gods. It is not a question of worshipping these intermediaries between the Being and man,

for they are simply men like ourselves. They are, of course, chosen by the Being for the mission that He indicates to them. It can be said that a Gautama and a Jesus are special human beings, with a more than outstanding place in the annals of humanity, but we insist, they are to be regarded as simple men.

In what does this Message consist? The Message consists, essentially, in the reformulation of the old themes of the Being, of the nothingness, of the liberty, and of the authenticity, present in the great doctrines known since the time of the ancient world: Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, the pre-Socratics, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and others. I have found in this Message a clarity of “concepts” relative to the Being, to the nothingness and to the liberty, with a wealth of “aspects”, the likes of which cannot perhaps be found in any previous doctrine. Similarly, I have found in this Message themes that I have not seen in any other message; as, for example, the distinction between Will of Permission and Will of God; likewise, the distinction between free will and liberty; also the simultaneity of liberty and nothingness in the manifestations of the Being.

One of the aspects that the Message stresses most is the disqualification of the *I*-ego as the supposed essence of man. We know that the question of the *I* has been relegated to the sidelines in modern scientific psychology starting with William Wundt, and all because it is said that the *I* is not a phenomenon, understanding by phenomenon, that which in some way can manifest itself to the senses. With this scientific criterion, attempts were made to expel the *I* from the educational and research centers. However, this has not been an obstacle for the *I* to continue on its merry way as the actual and practical identification of the ordinary man. It is no less

true that the same scientist who rejects the *I*, who discards it because it is not a phenomenon, lives his everyday life as the John Doe he says he is, namely, as an *I*. One of the great merits of existentialism is its having legitimized the *I* as a subject of research, as the matter that most concerns the man that each one of us is.

The *I*-man, that is, the man living and experiencing himself as an *I*, has been an essential determinant of human reality ever since the most remote times of history. Ever since man has had memory of himself as an historical entity, he has always seen himself as an *I*: Achilles of Troy, Plato, Julius Caesar, Paul of Tarsus, Johann Sebastian Bach, Napoleon, Washington, Bolivar lived and experienced themselves from the standpoint of the *I* that they were. Likewise, none of us can live his life without living and experiencing himself as an *I*, being an *I*.

It is necessary to legitimize the *I* as a real component of the human entity, inasmuch as it is only by taking the *I* as a real component of man that one can confront the present historical crisis. What predominates in the species today is precisely the man centered in himself, in his I-ness, in his egoism. This historical man that we are has suddenly found himself with an *I*, imbued with a longing for liberty but lacking orientation, inasmuch as his reason has been disqualified. To an *I* without values, with his back to the Transcendent, only one important activity is left – being concerned with himself. And today we are witnessing on the planet the triumphal display of the most ruthless selfishness. We don't see beyond our immediate interests, beyond material goods, affections, the search for pleasures. We don't care about the fact that we destroy nature, harm others, if in exchange we obtain some personal benefit.

It is urgent and imperative that man become aware of what

the *I* is, and of what he can or cannot expect from this component of his reality. One of the most significant themes the Message treats of is precisely the necessity of knowing the *I* that we are, so that we may discover that this *I* cannot be our essential identity. In this, too, the Message coincides with the doctrine of the great Masters. What in the Message is expressed as “putting the I-ego to death in all its manifestations” is what the Gospel proposes as the self-denial, the “deny yourself.” Likewise, in the *Diamond Sutra* of Buddha we are told that “the *I* is illusory”, and in the *Tao Te Ching* we are reminded that “the Tao-man is without *I*”.

In the *I* we can distinguish two essential components: the human nature and the Being. That is to say, in the *I*, as in every entity, we can distinguish two essential aspects: what in the entity there is of such an entity – the thing as such a thing – and the fact that this entity *is*. This *is* is the Being. When we say that the Being is a component of the entity, we are not suggesting that the Being is in the entity, but rather that the Being is its ultimate and definitive ground

I want to stress that before my encounter with the Message, I had already intuited that the ontological difference had to be taken not only as the intellectual perspective par excellence, but as the true place for living our lives. My search through Buddhism, Taoism, the pre-Socratics, Krishnamurti, and finally my approaching Christian mysticism, did not permit me to put into practice the question of the ontological difference. I felt that it was urgent and undeferrable for me *to attain realization*, that is, to make my surrender to the Being my life. In the innermost depths of my being, I knew that only my acknowledgement of the preeminence of the Being in the affairs of my ordinary life would mean this *realization* for me.

Now then, in *the slave of the Lord* and in the people who accompany her in making a life of the Message, I have found the incentive for also deciding to make a life of my surrender to the Being.

The Message insists in a special way on the importance of self-knowledge – learning to see ourselves as we are, not for remaining in this I but, rather, for transcending it. Oddly enough, when we get to unravel the *I*, we immediately discover that in this *I* there is another component distinct from the entity, and it is what we call the nothingness. Thus then, the knowledge of one’s self is not for remaining in the *I* itself, but for discovering this masked and hidden nothingness. When we set foot on the ground of the nothingness, we have taken the first great step toward discovering the true essence of man. It is in this stronghold, which is the nothingness, where the Being irrupts. This irruption of the Being in the human entity is the event of events, the fact of facts.

In the Message the question of the ontological difference, that is to say, the difference between entity, nothingness, and Being, is presented not just with a view to intellectual clarity but rather with a view to existential practice. The “concepts” that the Message offers us are, at the same time, a pressing call to *action*.

Today I understand the impact that the Message must have produced in the three friars; I mean the Message and their contact and acquaintance with the person who transmits it. As one gathers from the reading of the documents, the friars, over a period of five years, had the opportunity of having frequent contacts with *the slave of the Lord* and a group of people who accompanied her at the Milk Grotto, an annex of the Franciscan monastery in Bethlehem. In these encounters, they not only conversed on the express theme of the Message with *the*

slave of the Lord and the group that accompanied her, but they were able to absorb, in a slow and progressive way, the imperative of living the Truth. For the time being, Truth for the three friars was represented in the Gospel and in the message of Francis of Assisi.

One can understand the surprise that must have come over the three friars when they discovered that the Gospel was to be lived, for this was what the Institution to which they belonged said it had been doing for the last eight centuries. This surprise must have been filled with euphoria, with joy for their having found at last a full legitimation of *what* had been the axis and center of their lives: the Gospel. At the same time this discovery must have produced in them not a few anxieties. As a matter of fact, the inauthenticity of the Institution in which they had established their lives was becoming evident to them. When one has become wholeheartedly identified with an ideology or institution, and almost at the end of his life discovers that *that* to which he had fully dedicated himself is false, the pain, the frustration, must be terrible.

In the beginning, the friars desired and endeavored – believing it possible – to pursue the spiritual experience that was shaking the foundations of their lives with the consent of the Superiors of the Institution that, for so many years, had sheltered them under its roof. One should not forget this detail: the friars initially did not want to break with the Institution. And this is understandable, for they had formerly felt comfortable in it. Thus then, it must have been another cause of pain to perceive that the Institution was incompatible with the new undertaking to which they were being *called*.

It is probable that the friars experienced hesitations, terrible internal struggles, for the step they finally had to take implied

forsaking everything without knowing what was awaiting them; it was abandoning security for insecurity; it was choosing, as the permanent house of man, to be “out-in-the-open” – exposed to the elements. To abandon an institution in order to surrender oneself unconditionally to the Being is truly the adventure of adventures; and only after taking the step does one discover that this new life is the happiest of ventures; it is sheer blessedness.

For the Custody of the Holy Land and for the Roman Catholic Institution in general, the friars’ request of wanting to make a life of the Gospel must have been incomprehensible in the beginning. For the ecclesiastical authorities, it must have been baffling, something absurd, incomprehensible, that some religious should ask to be allowed to live the Gospel. The question the responsible authorities of the Custody and the other consulted ecclesiastical authorities must have asked themselves was no doubt this: And we, just what have we been doing all along if not living the Gospel? The friars’ petition was an indictment, a terrible accusation, even though initially they did not formulate it with this intention; but in fact their request to be *allowed* to make the Gospel their life was as if to say: the Gospel has been made a mockery of, here in our midst, in the Custody, in the ecclesiastical Institution.

We can now understand the enormous transcendency of the fact that some Franciscan religious, by their attitude, reveal that the Roman Catholic Institution has not been faithful to the Gospel. This decision of the friars, at least as I see it, signals as it were the end of this two-thousand-year-old institution that has been the Roman Catholic Church. Many will now see as well, with noonday clarity, that in truth Jesus Christ is no longer in the institutionalized church. There has always been the suspicion that the Roman Catholic Institution

as well as the other Christian institutions were not faithful representatives of the Gospel, but sufficient clarity was lacking for seeing that in fact this was so. Today, by virtue and grace of the three friars' resolute decision, the final veil has been lifted.

What will be the reaction of the Roman Catholic Institution in the face of its unmasking by these three religious? We don't know, but presumably they won't remain with their arms folded. They cannot remain with their arms folded – today less than ever – because never before has such a serious charge been brought against them on such solid grounds, since what the friars are saying by their attitude is that this Institution no longer has any mission to fulfill in human destiny. Today it is clearly seen that the institutionalized church has been, fundamentally, a deceit, a snare, an instrument of the *world* for leading man away from the path toward the Being, toward the Father. ***“Not for the world do I pray, but for those whom thou has given me, because they are thine”*** (Jn 17:9).

The conflict between the Roman Catholic Institution and the three religious calls into question the validity of the principle of authority with respect to questions of the spiritual life. As is known, the Roman Catholic Institution has presented itself as the mediator between the Father and the creature, and from this, essentially, stems the spiritual power it has claimed to possess. Spiritual power is precisely this function as bridge, and it is this that has represented for this Institution incredible prestige and power. More than once, the Institution has placed spiritual power at the service of temporal power: the Spirit at the service of pride, envy, avarice, etc. It is enough to read the history of this Institution. Now then, the Gospel is clear in this sense: one is either with the world

or with the Father; here there is no other alternative. There is no possible compromise between the ego – “the prince of this world” – and the Being, the Father. “...for the prince of the world is coming, and in me he has nothing” (Jn. 14:30).

In the religious Orders, this spiritual power is translated through the spirit of obedience into unrestricted submission to the authority; that is to say, the priest, the nun, the friar are to yield to the authority in every aspect of their lives. This has been more than an ideological dictatorship, worse than the totalitarian regimes, for it has been a spiritual dictatorship – a subjecting of consciences. And the most serious thing about the matter is that all this was claimed to be based on the Gospel itself.

Thus, when the friars speak before the authorities about being faithful to their conscience, it must have seemed to these dignitaries that something unusual was being proposed. Such an ignorance of the evangelical message is truly disconcerting: “*We must obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29).

What the friars clearly understood was that the vow of obedience must not be an obstacle for following the voice of conscience; that is to say, there must be no mediation between the individual and the Being. It could be said that there is indeed a mediator, the voice of conscience, namely, the Being Himself. In the Message we are taught that the conscience of each individual is and must be unbribable; there is no authority, there is no principle, norm or hierarchy that can prevail over conscience.

What the three friars were requesting seems to be most fitting and just: that the Institution recognize that its noblest function is to facilitate for its members the realization of man’s highest possibility, namely, that of living in direct

relationship with the Being. But the truth is that the request formulated by the three religious was flatly refused; in the beginning, there was a hesitance in this refusal, perhaps because of the unusualness of the petition, for as we have already noted, the petition was that they be granted freedom to be faithful to the Gospel.

Some may wonder: What has become of the three friars after leaving the Custody of the Holy Land? Have they left one institution in order to enter another? Around the Message and the person who receives it, a collectivity has formed: an already numerous group of people who have decided to surrender their liberty to the Being. In this new way of life of self-denial for the sake of an unrestricted surrender to the Being, the only law that reigns is fidelity to one's own conscience. This last statement – to be faithful to one's conscience – may seem somewhat incomprehensible, abstruse. What does it mean to abide by one's conscience, to listen to the voice of conscience? Is it really possible for man to establish a direct communication with the Being? Yes, indeed: not only is a direct communication with the Being possible, but the Being is constantly communicating with man through his conscience. The trouble is we don't listen, we don't pay attention to our conscience.

What is conscience? The conscience is the same as the Being. How does the conscience manifest itself in me? Let's take an example: at every moment I know that I am I; this is a conviction that accompanies me everywhere. Now then, this knowing about myself is not, as Descartes believed, "because I think". This knowing about myself comes from a root deeper than thought. In order to know about myself, I don't need to think: this is an immediate, direct knowing without intermediaries. It is a knowing that requires no effort on my part, that

is given to me in the most spontaneous and natural way; it is a knowing that does not come from me but, rather, is given to me. Thus, then, the knowing about myself is “something” that accompanies me permanently, something like a light that enlightens me from within. This light is what we can call the conscience, or the Being present in me.

If the human entity were to become attentive to this light that constantly accompanies him, he would learn to live every moment listening to the voice of his conscience. When we say voice of conscience, it is not that we hear words but this light floods us, and then we know what we must do in the face of each situation.

In the Message we are told that we are to take the voice of conscience as the only guide of our life, not the gods, nor reason, nor free will, nor good or evil but, we insist, the voice of conscience. Thus, as an answer to the crisis that the species suffers today, we are offered in the Message, in my opinion, the only luminous way out: to be faithful to the voice of conscience.

The group of people who make up the aforementioned collectivity, which has arisen around the Message and the person who receives it, is already the initiation – through an effective living together – of the departure from the desolation that reigns in the man of our day. This is a collectivity in its inception, and we don’t know what its prospects for the future may be; nevertheless, herein lies the seed of the future humanity. The main book of the Message is precisely *The “New Earth” of the new man*, and the Message is addressed to the men of the “New Earth”. The “New Earth” is this immediate, concrete possibility in me of learning to listen to the voice of conscience. This clearly tells us that the Message is no Utopia, it is not the abandoning of this world in order to

go to *Topos Uranios* (Plato's heaven), but all the contrary: to penetrate into what is deepest and most concrete in ourselves. This – what is deepest and most concrete in ourselves – is the Being.

The three friars left the Custody of the Holy Land and joined this collectivity that has arisen around the Message and the person who receives it. They did not leave one institution in order to enter another; all the contrary, they left what is established in order to become pilgrims, ever more attentive to the *Will* of the Being; pilgrim is understood in the sense of gradually reducing the distance – as a result of one's self-surrender – between the human and the divine. To be a pilgrim is to be constantly alert, attentive to our radical indigence, ever present to the luminous fact that we are nothing. The friars left the Custody of the Holy Land and placed themselves under the protective roof of the *nothingness*.

Why has it taken the human entity so long – and it is still very difficult for us – to learn to listen to the voice of conscience? In the face of the call of conscience, there stand, as its opposite, the interests of convenience. In the Platonic dialogues we already find a clear example of the struggle between the voice of conscience and the convenience. In the first dialogue of the Republic, when Socrates debates with Trasimachus about what justice is, the Sophist, questioned by Socrates regarding what is just, answers: "Just is what is convenient for me." Socrates replies instead: "No, just is what is just." In each of us there is this battle between Sophistry and Truth, between convenience and the voice of conscience. And most of the time we get carried away by our convenience.

What is called the interests of the world, the advantages of

civilization, success, public recognition, pleasures – all this is what constitutes the realm of convenience. Man remains in himself, a prisoner of the immediate attractions the *world* offers him, and in this way he closes himself to the voice of conscience. To listen to the voice of conscience is to separate oneself from the interests of the world in order to draw near to the Transcendent, to the Absolute, to the Being, to the Tao, to the Dharma, to the Father. It is to these men that the Message is addressed. These are the men of the “New Earth”.

Now then, taking shelter under the nothingness, leaping into the void, is the only path that leads us to the Father’s house. In contrast to the prospect that the institution, as mediator, can offer us, it is doubtlessly evident that the nothingness, the leap into the void, is indeed the path. To accept the institution means to establish the human as the access route to the Father. And this is just the opposite of what should be done, namely, to radically disqualify the human, to renounce every possible recourse that the human faculties can offer us, and in a total *dark night* to set out with sure steps toward our Essential Abode.

The leap into the void can never be taken for social, historical, psychological motivations, but because a direct call from the Being is felt in one’s innermost depths. It is this force, this call that comes to us from the Being – the voice of conscience – that impels us to break with all that is established and enables us to accept living our indigence as a state of grace. The leap into the void is not an attitude that is fruit of desperation, nor is it a suicidal escape; on the contrary, we assume this attitude because we make the discovery of discoveries: that the absolute essence of man is not in the human but in the Being.

This is why the three friars’ leap into the void is an event

that must be taken fully into account by the man of today; this *decision* ought to be taken as a mirror for learning to see ourselves.

Hence, the leap into the void is the only legitimate “program” that falls to the man of today. All that is not a leap into the void must be seen as suspect. Furthermore, the leap into the void is a voice of alert in face of what is proposed by the false messiahs and that pandemonium of esoteric movements. It is of utmost importance to establish the sharp distinction between the surrender to the Being under the shelter of the nothingness – as proposed by the Message and the whole universal mysticism – and what we have called the pandemonium of esoteric movements. Esotericism handles the question of the nothingness with sleight of hand; it wants to establish a bridge between the Absolute and the *I* without passing through the self-denial, and this means that the possibility of reaching the Absolute can never be given; one gets to the Being only through the path of the nothingness, through the denial of self.

In esotericism, in short, what is offered to the initiate is the gratification, the ratification of his ego. In one way or another, what is sought in these occult movements is security, prestige, power, and all of it under the guise of doing good for humanity. What they call doing good is providing man with securities, as much in the material order as in the spiritual, and this will necessarily culminate in man’s remaining in himself, in the creature, in the entity.

In the esoteric movements as well as in the institutionalized churches, the Being is substituted by entities of the invisible world. This invisible world is, in fact, an indubitable, incontestable reality, and by reason of its being occult, it is all the more dangerous. The man of Western culture has stubbornly

persisted in denying the existence of these entities of the invisible realm; he calls this superstition, trickery. It is high time we understood that the greatest trickery and superstition is to foolishly believe that these worlds do not exist.

Man's contact and dealings with the entities of the invisible world offer him all sorts of knowledge, possibilities of miraculous healings, of accomplishing wonders to astonish the unwary; in short, they can provide gifts that consecrate the human entity within his exclusively human boundaries, and all of it with the sole attraction of power. On the other hand, the *only thing* these esoteric practices cannot do is lead us to the Being. It is well to keep in mind that the Being is not in the invisible world either. Properly speaking, the Being is neither in the visible nor in the invisible, but rather, He is further beyond or much closer than these dimensions. The Being is the ground of all possible worlds, but He does not identify with any of these worlds, and to reach Him one has to cast aside any and every world. The only thing left for us to do is to leap into the void, the nothingness. *"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world"* (Jn 17:16).

III

THE HISTORICAL CRISIS THAT WESTERN HUMANITY SUFFERS AND, THROUGH THE WEST, THE ENTIRE PLANET

Today, in this 20th century, we reach the culmination of twenty-five centuries of history. The birth certificate of our Western culture is found in the statement attributed to the Sophist Protagoras: "*Man is the measure of all things.*" Starting with the establishment of Sophistry in Greece, that is, of rationality, we see the beginning of what we could call the reign of humanism. Man no longer seeks to live his life under the tutelage of the gods but, rather, relies on his exclusively human possibilities; it is man himself who, on the basis of his free will and his reason, sets himself up as lord and master of his own life. When the history of philosophy speaks of the struggle between Sophistry on one side, and Plato and Aristotle on the other, the distance and separation between the two is, in fact, exaggerated, since it could well be said that the Platonic dialectic and the Aristotelian logic are nothing but the legalization of the human, with the immediate clarification that in this struggle we are clearly shown two totally opposed ways of assuming life: convenience and righteousness of conscience. The Sophists represent the interests of convenience; Plato and Aristotle, on the other hand, represent the righteousness of conscience, for they were moved by the longing to discover the Truth.

With Aristotelian logic, human reason is already conse-

crated for the ages to come as the highest tribunal of Truth. Aristotle simply brings to consummation the proposition of Protagoras that man is to live essentially from the standpoint of what is human. Starting with Plato and Aristotle, humanism will no longer be called into question. The error of these two philosophers, and of the whole history of philosophy up to and including Sartre, consisted in their having taken the human, as such, as the essential identification of man; and this was done despite the fact that Anaximander, Heraclitus and Parmenides had already, at the dawn of philosophy, explicitly proposed the disqualification of the human, emphasizing in a radical way the question of the preeminence of the Being. There's no doubt that today, at this advanced stage of history and in the light the Message offers us, we see that this exaltation of the human – humanism – was a necessary step that had to be taken in the evolution of Man. In the first place, as we have already pointed out, humanism had the unquestionable merit of having liberated Man from the tutelage of the gods and all other entities of the invisible world; in the second place, humanism as a path to the Truth is seen today as a completely exhausted vein; at this late stage in history, it no longer makes any sense to find an incentive for Life on the basis of the exclusively human. Hence the historical-spiritual juncture in which this Message appears: faced with the disqualification of religions, of philosophies, of ideologies, of the human in general, man is left with only one way out: to recognize and to put into daily praxis the preeminence of the Being.

There once were Christian thinkers who had a clarity about the superiority of the Gospel over human reason, but the truth is that these very theologians ended up giving the primacy to reason. This has been a curious case of bedazzlement that

Western man has suffered for over twenty-five centuries.

In the philosophy of this century, just as in science and in the renewal of mysticism, it has been clearly demonstrated that human reason does not possess the qualifications for guiding man, that reason is not the arbiter of Truth. It is urgent and imperative that the men of today come to a clear awareness of this significant fact. It is of paramount importance that man learn to turn a deaf ear to reason as the guide of his ordinary, everyday life; it is urgent that we learn to live outside of what until today has been called sound-mindedness, sanity.

To continue today to be installed in the tents of reason is to increase the deterioration that is presently spreading everywhere. Reason fulfilled a role of the greatest significance for the evolution of the species well into the 20th century, but precisely at this late stage of history, it becomes mostly a burden for us, a dead weight. When we speak here of the disqualification of reason, it is not that we are proposing its abolition. Reason is, in a way, a definitive conquest of the species, but it is just as true that it doesn't serve to orient man in his real living. Rational thought will continue to have its validity and usefulness in the area of man's material subsistence – nothing more.

It is very important that the man of our day become fully aware of the fact that the role of science is not that of offering us the Truth; unfortunately a good number of educated people continue to have an unlimited confidence in science. So, for example, science is what continues to give meaning and lustre to the universities; and we know that the university is among the most prestigious institutions of our culture. Science does not possess the qualifications to embark upon the study of the Transcendent; it can tell us nothing about the Being, the

nothingness, death, the ultimate meaning of life. In short, science does not have the last word on any theme or issue; its knowing is always next-to-last.

Another definitive objection that can be made against science was already formulated by José Ortega y Gasset: “*With science one can do everything except live on the basis of it.*” This means that science cannot be applied to matters that constitute our ordinary life. Thus, for example, no one can fall in love scientifically; nor can one become glad or sad according to a scientific formula. In short, no one can live or die scientifically.

It is urgent and imperative that we turn a deaf ear to science and rationality in everything that pertains to our real living. To continue using reason as the guide of our lives is to allow ill-being and misery to gain an ever-increasing hold on us.

The literary-philosophical movement of *the absurd* represents the putting into effect, in the affairs of one’s ordinary, everyday life, the disqualification of reason. The theatre of Eugene Ionesco is a very eloquent example of rationality’s definitive loss of prestige. Ionesco himself has said: “*being reasonable is now left to ridiculous people*”. The absurd means that reason itself is meaningless. Man falls into absurdity because he takes reason seriously. If we take reason to its ultimate consequence, we immediately discover that it is totally devoid of meaning, which is to say, the absurd is not a movement contrary to reason, but the most consistent rational position yet taken. Let us recall the famous principle of sufficient reason: “*Everything has its reason for being; there is nothing without a reason for being.*” Now then, if we apply the principle of reason to the universe, for example, we will see that the answer – the ultimate reason for everything that exists – appears to us as impossible. This means that by

relying on reason and asking it to give us a reason, we are left with no reason to give; that is, reason leads us by its own steps to non-reason; the most reasonable thing is the non-reason, and this is proclaimed by reason itself.

In the development of the manifold aspects that we are indicating about the present historical crisis, it is well to point out that the decision of the three friars is a resonance of and a response to the essential problems of present-day man. As a matter of fact, their break with the Institution represents their rejection of rationality as the essential guide of life. "Institution" means a system of knowledge, of rational formulations that are preserved and put into practice for the purpose of having norms to rule our everyday behavior. What predominates in the institution is what's known, what's stable, what's established, what affords security. Hence, the act of breaking with a given institution, and even more so, with every institution, as is the case of these three friars, clearly tells us that the terrain of rationality has been surpassed.

We have pointed out that the two great characteristics of Western culture coming from Greece were rationality and liberty. We have already seen how human reason claimed to serve as arbiter, not only in questions of a secondary order, but also in the definitive and transcendental issues of existence. But we have already noted that this role of essential guide was, as is revealed to us today, an error. Let us now turn to the study of how liberty has functioned in the West and in what state it is to be found in our day.

For the Greek philosopher, liberty and rationality were indissolubly linked. But we believe that the consciousness of liberty, even among the Greeks, occupied a deeper stratum than reason; seen from a distance of twenty-five centuries,

only in appearance do they seem to be interrelated, in a situation of reciprocity and complementarity. The Greek man breaks with all submission to extra-human tutelages and openly and decisively proclaims that man himself is the sole master of his destiny. Man's decision for autonomy, based on the human, found its support in the discovery of rationality. The Greek citizen began to live this enterprise of liberty by leaning on the powers of discourse – the word sustained by reasons.

This coupling of liberty and reason constitutes the hidden essence of Western culture. For us children of the West, life is meaningless if it is not founded, in the final analysis, on the power of freely deciding about our own existence. The life of the individual has been lived as a private enclosure in which only the individual possesses full rights. What touches us about many of the memorable events of Western history is the deep and unbribable conviction that life is worth living only if lived under the shelter of liberty.

How is this Greek heritage of liberty faring among us? There is no doubt that for the men of today liberty still continues to be the essential incentive for their existence: life has no meaning if there is no liberty. Now then, what has become of the marriage between liberty and reason? Reason can no longer be liberty's guide; and this liberty now finds itself alone.

Can the human entity live with a liberty left alone, a liberty without a guide? Well then, the present situation is that liberty is going adrift: "*...and these people of the West have suddenly experienced a panic fear, and it seems to them that they are sinking, that they are foundering in the void*" (Ortega y Gasset). A liberty without an orientation produces anxiety and desolation. As Sartre rightly points out: "*anxiety comes from*

liberty”; what’s meant is a liberty that becomes autonomous, in the sense that it presumes to be self-sufficient. When the liberty does not accept an orientation, chaos results. This chaos is the panorama that the man of today offers us. The resolute decision of the three friars to leave the Custody of the Holy Land also offers us a lucid answer as to what to do with this liberty which today goes adrift. The climactic decision of the three priests consists in placing their liberty in a total, unconditional, and direct way into the hands of the Being, into the hands of the Unknown, into the hands of the Father.

It is good to highlight and emphasize Humanism as the distinguishing characteristic of this Western culture. Among all the cultures of the planet there has not been one that has more highly exalted the human than this culture of ours. There has been no Humanism, properly speaking, except in the West. In the Orient, in Africa, in the pre-Columbian cultures, what predominated was the man tutored by the entities of the invisible world. The great merit of Greece was its having dispensed with the need for protection from these occult forces; and Greece dispensed with the gods because it discovered a power that it considered more powerful than the gods themselves: rational discourse. Instead of offering sacrifices and prayers, the Greek man strives to elaborate reasonings, that is to say, he decides in favor of discourse.

Now then, this Greek culture imbued with liberty and rationality, namely this Humanism, has imposed itself on the entire planet. It can be said that in all the villages, or in almost all of them, there appears the figure of the school teacher. The school teacher is the most worthy representative of the philosophy of Aristotle, that is, of Greece. Through the school, the child becomes steeped in rationality and liberty, that is, in the Greek spirit. This is why the historical crisis that

the West suffers today is a planetary crisis. Liberty is no longer a motivation characteristic of the peoples who are the direct heirs of Greece but has become the patrimony of the entire species. That is why – we insist – a disqualified reason and a liberty going adrift place the destiny of humankind in a state of suspense.

Until now, we have spoken of Western culture, placing the accent on the Greek heritage; but there is no doubt that one cannot speak of the West without equally highlighting the importance of the Judaeo-Christian revelation. Christianity, as the official religion of the West, has also penetrated into the innermost layers of our existence. I have always affirmed that the historical figure that most influences our formation is Jesus of Nazareth. Even if we are avowed atheists, even if we do not practice any of the sacraments and cults advocated by the Christian churches, the fact is that Christianity has shaped our lives.

We could likewise ask ourselves today, how is Christianity faring? We know that the Middle Ages was predominantly Christian; the Catholic Church was the gravitational center of the life of that epoch. But beginning with the Renaissance and through the course of modern times, the Christian faith was gradually supplanted by scientific rationality. The very followers of Jesus Christ, representatives of the Church, let themselves be charmed by science. It seemed as if the man of faith had to ask reason for permission.

Christianity, in good measure, came to replace the gods that Greek philosophy had placed in bankruptcy. Man's need for transcendence could not be satisfied by rationality; hence, the historical importance of the role filled by the Christian institutions.

Reason never defeated the gods; the Greek Olympus apparently was left devitalized; the worship of its gods fell into oblivion. But this man of the West, through the Christian institutions, simply substituted one cult for another, since the cult to the Olympian gods and the cult to the Christian god have essentially the same foundation: in the final analysis, the security, preservation and prosperity of the *I*.

The Christian institutions, in the name of Jesus Christ, imposed only one god. Now then, did the cult of this god mean being faithful to the Gospel message? Evidently not. *“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head”* (Mt 8:20). *“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself* (Mt 16:24). Jesus Christ proposed indigence as the only legitimate house for man. We have nothing to hold on to, either in this world or in the gods; and it is on the basis of this radical indigence, and only on the basis of it, that we can discover the Absolute, the Being. We are not speaking of indigence in the sense of the lack of material goods but in the sense of the denial of the ego. The totally indigent person discovers that his essence is not in the human or in the divinities, but in That which is beyond all.

The bulwark of the indigent man is the nothingness. And only by virtue and grace of this nothingness are we saved from the human and from the divinities. If I discover that this *I* – with all its interests and with what it is as human – is nothing, what possible interest could I have in preserving it, in exalting it? Consequently, if I am nothing, of what use are gods or spiritual heavens? The nothingness is the great liberator, and, at the same time, it is what opens for me the doors to union with the Being.

When Frederick Nietzsche spoke to us about the death of

God, he was aiming directly at the heart of the matter. Indeed this god of the cults is highly suspect. It could be perfectly seen that an incongruity existed – and Nietzsche discovered it – between the authenticity and luminosity of the word of Jesus Christ and how this word had been muddled, devitalized, and deformed by the Christian cults. *“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and Truth”* (Jn 4:23).

Jesus Christ has been the great forgotten one in the Christian institutions. If one were to continue taking these institutions as the legitimate representatives of the word of Jesus Christ, one would have to take Jesus of Nazareth as a figure already completely swallowed up by history, since Christianity as an institution is, without a doubt, an historical cadaver. Could we also say of Jesus Christ that He, too, is an historical cadaver? It is enough to re-read the Gospels and to approach His Word in a fresh, impartial manner and disposed to receive what is being offered there to immediately feel stirred in the depths of our being and feel a call that comes from the innermost of ourselves.

Personally, I consider that Jesus Christ is one of the Masters of the species whose Word could be the guide for this liberty that today is going adrift. *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life”* (Jn 14: 6).

The break of the three religious priests with institutionalized Christianity is the result of their having felt this call of the word of Jesus Christ, a call to authenticity, to truly put into practice what that word proposes. Fidelity to conscience, in the three religions, is nothing other than the exigency to be faithful to the Gospel word.

IV
HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS,
AND CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE BEING

"History is the treasury of errors"(José Ortega y Gasset). There are two great roads that lead us to the same conclusion of the failure of the human in man: reason and history. We have already seen in the previous pages how reason itself, from its own standpoint, proclaimed the non-reason as what's most reasonable. That is to say, if any partisan of reason still seeks to remain within the boundaries of rationality in order to be faithful to and consistent with reason, he will have to live in the non-reason, in the absurd. The absurd is not a notion of ours, but the logical culmination of twenty-five centuries of Western culture. Now then, history, or better said historical consciousness, is also a royal road that tells us the same thing: history is error.

If from this late stage in time we were to glance back over the twenty-five centuries of our history, we would verify that what each epoch, each century, each generation shows us is a successive chain of errors. The history of philosophy is nothing but the history of successive rectifications that some philosophers make of those who have gone before them. Plato gathers together all the traditions that have preceded him, unites them, rectifies them, and then presents his own vision. Aristotle then does the same as Plato, but this time rectifying Plato. And from then on until today, each new philosopher will, on the one hand, establish his solidarity with the entire past and, at the same time, make a profound rectification of this past. What's new and original in each philosopher is precisely the rectification he proposes of the past. What has

taken place in the history of philosophy parallels what took place in the history of science. The science proposed by the ancients as for example the physics of Aristotle, is reviewed and rectified in the Renaissance. The philosophy of Descartes is, in good measure, the rejection of Aristotle and is, on the other hand, what Descartes proposes as an innovation. Within this Cartesian innovation was the consolidation of what Galileo called the *new sciences*. The Kantian postulate of the difference between the phenomenon and the noumenon is going to mean the establishment of the definitive limits of scientific investigation. This question of the limits of science is going to culminate in the 20th century in a revolution against what had been Modern science: opposite the scientific law, the probabilistic calculus; opposite the criterion of the unit limit (the element), the unfathomable ground of subatomic reality. The physics of Aristotle, viewed with the eyes of Renaissance man, was something childish; so too, the physics of Newton, viewed with the eyes of today's man, would be like a game for adolescents. Therefore, there is no way history can offer us the Truth; it will always be seen as error. And it would be terribly naive to suppose that today indeed, unlike yesterday, we are going to know the ultimate essence of life and the world. In this regard, one would have to say with Ortega y Gasset: "*The only absolute Truth is that Truth is relative to each epoch*". This is equivalent to saying that the Truth is unattainable for man, since Truth either is absolute or it is not the Truth; here there are no middle terms.

Historical consciousness means *coming to consciousness* of these two failures: reason and history as vehicles that could lead us to the Truth. Thus it could be said that the great heritage we receive from this venerable past that is Western culture is the greatest of failures; not that Plato, Galileo, Kant,

Shakespeare, Racine, Michelangelo, Picasso are individually a failure, but that the entire past taken as a whole does not help us unravel the ultimate meaning of reality. Therefore our legitimate heritage, the great legacy we have received from our ancestors, is this consciousness of failure. This is not being pessimistic, but it's having the courage to see things just as they are.

Now then, if reason and history cannot offer us the absolute Truth, does this indicate that we are to live without the Truth? At first glance, it might seem as if there were no way out, as if we were trapped in a blind alley. Where do we search if reason, as reason, and if the centuries-old effort of the great geniuses of this culture do not offer us the answer, where do we search?

“History is a principdom or ‘poetdom’ of error” (Martin Heidegger). History, as such, is the house of error; not in the sense that a given movement is erroneous, but that history cannot be other than error. The consecration of history as expression of error is a powerful voice of alert to the fact that the humanity of the past has always lived astray. And this going astray has a name: to have sought to establish the human as the measure of man. In the preceding pages what we have precisely suggested is that the human does not have the qualifications for being the essential identity of man. But let us continue where we left off. If history is error itself, where do we search for the Truth? Could this failure be definitive, and is there no possibility of a genuine, authentic, complete way out?

In the face of this apparent total disaster, let us pause for a moment of silence; let us gather up all the courage and patience we can and let us be still. Could silence and stillness be perhaps a way for drawing near to the absolute Reality?

Let us see. Let us truly remain silent. What happens? Things are still there; here am I, without the possibility of resorting to either reason or history, but I continue to be me. It seems that this apparent total failure doesn't completely drag me down; there is something in me that is not affected by this failure.

What is there within me that is not affected by either reason or history? When I remain silent, when I am able to surrender myself to the stillness, in this silence, in this stillness, the brilliance of the Being irrupts, we hear the voice of conscience. The Being, the Conscience, have always been there, but it was necessary that man go through the trauma of breaking away from reason and the historical so that the Being could unveil Himself. Reason and history were the obstacles, and man had to dramatically undeceive himself about these obstacles in order that the path might be freed. Today the path is free.

Error and failure are not of themselves negative. In this case, they have been highly positive, enlightening. It was necessary, and it is necessary to go through error in order to discover Truth. Error is not, as is traditionally thought, the opposite of Truth but an essential part of it. The same thing is said to us in the Message: it is necessary to live the fact that identification with the *I* is *not*, so that the true surrender to the Being might take place in us, thus enabling us to undertake the journey as *pilgrims of the Truth*.

Someone could argue: if history is error, might this not likewise mean that the Message is also error? Isn't everything that history produces consumed by history itself? Let us pause and ponder over the question carefully: the word of the great Masters – of a Buddha, of a Lao Tzu, of a Jesus Christ – and this Message, do not come from the human, do not bear the

seal of the historical; history, therefore, does not consume them. The messages of these great Masters are not the fruit of human effort; they are not the result of the activity or play of the human faculties. The message of Buddha, for example, is a gift that Gautama receives. Gautama learned to be silent; he realized that he could not count on his mere human possibilities; he remained still, and in this stillness he was surrendering himself, denying himself, and as fruit of this denial, the voice of the Being shone forth in him: the Being, That from which all things come and to which all things return, That which is before and after, which always is, That which nothing consumes. From the moment in which man transcends the boundaries of the human, he becomes one with That. *“The Father and I are one”* (Jn 10:30).

“When we arrive at the ‘Nothingness’ we are ‘Liberty’ and we are on our way toward the Being.

We are all necessarily headed toward the Being.

With our backs to the Being

the ‘Nothingness’ is negative because it ‘is not’.

Facing the Being,

the ‘Nothingness’ is the most positive thing

about the human being.” (The “New Earth”, p. 240)

It can be said that the nothingness is one of the most extraordinary rediscoveries that take place in the man of the 20th century. With the consciousness of the nothingness, one transcends what reason and history were able to offer us as pathways toward the Truth. The nothingness is that atmosphere of silence, of stillness, which we must learn to enter. The nothingness, as has already been said, reveals itself to us today as the great governess of man. The nothingness is beyond all academies, beyond all universities, beyond all laboratories of scientific experimentation, beyond all mental

power, beyond all esotericism.

“*When we arrive at the ‘Nothingness’ we are ‘Liberty’.*” The *nothingness* liberates man from all possible holds, from all possible attractions coming from the human world or the invisible worlds: “*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head*” (Mt 8:20). Radical indigence is the richest treasure man has at his disposal. This is why when we see that this man of the 20th century has been tossed by the waves of history onto the shores of indigence, it is time to sing, Alleluia!

The revolution is on the march; man has already caught sight of the Promised Land, the “New Earth”. We need only learn to be faithful to the voice of conscience. But it is also true that present-day humanity is left with only one alternative: either it sinks into the swamps of desolate solitude or it learns to discover that *sonorous solitude* of which John of the Cross speaks. Either we remain in desolation or we enter into the house of Bliss.

What to say of the revolutions that history presents to us, such as, for example, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution? A great sadness comes over us when we think that many of our own kind are still trapped in those swampy waters of history and reason. It's time for us to wake up from our unconsciousness. Up to this moment, we were not, because of unconsciousness, responsible for our actions; but from now on, when the Being speaks to us through this Message, we will be considered fully responsible for what we do with our lives. It can be said that man's consciousness of the nothingness is his coming-of-age; we can no longer allow ourselves to be led by the hand of our mother — history, our father—reason, but we are to learn to walk on our own.

For man, a new era, a new history begins. Until today, man was in the hands of the gods and under the power of the human free will – the *I*. Today, the luminous possibility opens up that we learn the lesson of complete humility: that we recognize the imperative necessity of surrendering ourselves *totally, unconditionally, and directly* to the Being – to the Being who is ultimately our true Essence.

Part Two

A CASE OF CONSCIENCE
DOCUMENTATION

With Personal Reflections
by the Author of the Essay

INTRODUCTION

By the Author of the Essay

1. The Documentation which constitutes the second part of this book is, as has already been said, the dramatic history of three Catholic priests, Franciscan friars who, through their encounter with a Message of the Being, come to the consciousness of the essential limits of all institutionalized Religion to the point of transcending the religious structures in which they were inserted, taking the leap into the void. The chronological order of the documents allows the reader to personally follow, through the irreplaceable language of the facts, the maturing process of this coming-to-consciousness.

2. Of very special importance are the documents relative to the slave of the Lord. In these documents the important thing to highlight, above all, is the transcendence and significance of the “knowledge” that the slave of the Lord receives from the Being. As we have said, it was this “knowledge” that motivated the coming-to-consciousness of the three friars. Through the Message, they discovered truths which up to that moment were veiled to them. They first of all discovered the full authenticity and eternal validity of the Gospel, and the corresponding imperative need of making it their life. Likewise, the unity of the Old and New Testaments was revealed to them; that is to say, that with the Message the prophecies of the Bible were being completely fulfilled.

But beyond its resonance within the specifically Christian sphere, this Message has a far greater reach since, in truth, it

is destined for the entire globe; it is a call for all religions, all doctrines, to take shelter under the shade of the one Truth: the preeminence of the Being.

This is why this Message does not exclude anyone; all of us, in principle, are being called. But of course it will be necessary that we be disposed and prepared to accept in ourselves the *greatest* revolution still unknown to historical times. This disposition and preparation can be formulated in a very simple way: accepting, in the most concrete actions of our lives, that we are nothing, that our true *being* is the Being.

Opening ourselves to the nothingness implies abandoning the tents of reason and surrendering our free will to the Being. This means that we have left behind our seeking to understand by relying on thought as the ultimate judge of Truth. This does not mean that we should abandon the critical spirit but, rather, just the opposite; we should not accept anything that we are not fully convinced of on our own, but for sure we should be ready to admit that the Truth lies beyond human understandings. Nor does this mean – when we say beyond human understandings – that the Truth, the Being, is outside of us. By “beyond” we mean to indicate that we are to penetrate into our innermost depths.

Therefore, being a “follower” of this Message does not mean that we have renounced being ourselves, that we are prisoners, as if hypnotized by “something”, by “someone”. It is true that in order to be a “follower” of this Message, as of every true message, it is necessary to renounce one’s own thought and will, but all this is done in order, to attain the true liberty – what Paul of Tarsus called “being sons of God”.

3. In the friars’ *presentation* of the documentation and in the documents composed of the *joint letters* addressed to the

authorities of the Order and their respective replies, one can clearly note the reasons that led the three Franciscan friars to break with the Institution. It will be noted that some of the joint letters are signed by three religious and others by four; this is due to the fact that Fr. Giuseppe Costantin came to join Barriuso, Angelisanti and Napoli later on (in 1979), after these three had taken the first steps. Costantin did not take the final step of withdrawing from the Institution since, as he expresses it in his last letter, he felt that his moment had not yet arrived; moreover, he believed that it was possible to carry out his spiritual experience within the Institution itself.

The first joint act of the three religious was to inform the Custos about the manuscript of *The "New Earth"*. As we know, this book summarizes and synthesizes the Message received by *the slave of the Lord*. This book speaks not only to Christians but to all men without distinctions of race or creed. The language used in this work does not respond to the specific interests of any cultural tradition; indeed, it can be translated into the language of any creed or doctrine. Concretely, the key term around which the language of this work revolves is the word Being. And, as is easy to understand, this word is supremely impartial, as a word, and therefore it can be used by any believer without his feeling it as alien to or a denial of his particular vision of reality.

In their letter to the authorities of the Custody informing them about the book, the three religious point out the special circumstance that the Message is offered as "first fruits" to the Franciscans, and especially to the Franciscans of the Holy Land.

Another aspect worth highlighting in these documents is the sojourn at the Milk Grotto of *the slave of the Lord* and the group of people who were accompanying her, a sojourn that

gave the three religious the opportunity of delving deeply into the Message together with the group, and of intellectually and vitally assimilating its contents.

The problem arises when the three religious, joined by Costantin, present to their superiors a petition that was to affect their very persons, namely, the request to move to the Milk Grotto after the departure of the group in order to continue – by themselves, in this same place, and with the necessary liberty – the experience begun from the outside and with these people, surrendering themselves unconditionally, totally, and directly to the Will of God in all aspects of their lives, assuming all the consequences of insecurity that this decision entailed. This petition of the Fathers is going to produce annoyances and later on open rejection on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities; this rejection is directed, above all, against *the slave of the Lord* and the Message. And this is, in truth, the pivotal point of the discord. The collective aspect of this *case of conscience*, which stands out above all in the joint letters, should not cause us to overlook the manner in which each one of the protagonists has lived it individually. The following is a brief description of each protagonist for the purpose of highlighting some of the outstanding facts and aspects of the documents that concern them individually.

José Barriuso

The majority of the documents relative to José Barriuso have as their purpose the presentation of the Message to different members of the hierarchy: to the Custos and Discretorium, to the General of the Order, and finally to the Pope. As we have said, Fr. José Barriuso was the instrument chosen by the Being, through *the slave of the Lord*, for

making the Message known to the world. This explains why Barriuso has presented all the books written by *the slave of the Lord*, with the exception of *The "New Earth"*.

Father Barriuso was the first to come to consciousness of the importance of the Message and of the extraordinary significance of its bearer, *the slave of the Lord*. This coming-to-consciousness in Barriuso was not easy, for it took him some six years. But at the end of those six years he was able, at last, to truly discover what the Message was: a divine intervention, a call from the Father to all men so that all might *come to consciousness* of the preeminence of the Being.

A crucial moment in the polemic between the three Franciscans and the Institution was Father Barriuso's request for authorization to go to Mexico for the second time. On this occasion, Raffaele Angelisanti was the Acting Custos; that is to say, Angelisanti was temporarily exercising the highest authority in the Custody. Prior to this, Barriuso had addressed his request to the Custos, who was present at the time exercising his normal duties. The answer of the Custos was dilatory; Barriuso feels the urgent need to go to Mexico, and this is why he again addresses the authorities in order to obtain the permission. This time it fell to Angelisanti to act on Barriuso's persistent request for permission. And here we come to one of the main points in the thorny issue of the disagreement that was being enacted between the parties. Angelisanti, in answer to Barriuso's second request, taking into account the urgency and importance this trip across the seas had for Barriuso, refers him to his own *conscience*; that is to say, Barriuso, according to his *conscience*, is to be the one to have the last word. As can be noted, this decision of Angelisanti, as supreme authority of the Custody, was a voice of alert for the Institution. Perhaps it was this that completely

opened the eyes of the ecclesiastical authorities to the real danger that the three priests represented with their petition for “liberty to live the pure Gospel”. This “liberty” truly represented the great threat: the total unhinging of the established order.

Raffaele Angelisanti

In the documents relative to Raffaele Angelisanti, most noteworthy is that which concerns the publication of the book *The “New Earth”*. His encounter with the Message represented for Angelisanti an awakening and deepening of his ontological-metaphysical vocation. It was concretely in the book *The “New Earth”* – the presentation and publication of which were in his charge – where he found a synthesis of the great themes of theology and metaphysics. But this synthesis simultaneously offered a new consideration of essential aspects, many of them barely touched upon in the traditional *wisdom*. Angelisanti also finds in the Message original themes that offered the indispensable complement for an integral vision of man. He persists in bringing out in the Message the call to existential praxis, that is, to take the Message as a concrete, practical guide for living one’s surrender to the Being.

Another point worth noting in these documents is the intervention of the *Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes*. This intervention came about as a result of a letter that Angelisanti wrote to the Pope for the purpose of sending him the book *The “New Earth”*. This letter, devoid of the usual protocol, was worded in a personal and familiar style; in it, the Pope was given some indications and suggestions on how to read the book and, at the same time, it

emphasized his responsibility – as head of the Catholic Institution – in the face of the significance of this Message, which was nothing less than a gift from the Lord. As is to be noted, what the Roman authorities perceived was the danger that this Message and its bearer represented for the Roman Catholic Institution. Angelisanti received no direct reply from the Pope; rather, it was the Custos of the Holy Land who, in fact, received an answer. And the answer did not come directly from the Pope but from the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes. Nevertheless, Rome’s reaction was strikingly telling: the Message was a heresy, and its bearer, a raving pseudo-mystic. As one can see, with this response from Rome, the die is cast. And the situation worsens; for the three Franciscans, instead of yielding in the face of these threats, become ever more steadfast in their firm resolution to abide solely by the voice of conscience as the only law for their lives. The three friars realized that they were left with only one alternative: to yield before the threats or to run the risk of taking the leap into the void. They chose to leap.

It is important to point out how Rome’s opposition causes Fr. Vittorino Joannes – theologian from Milan and consultant for the spiritual publications of the Custody of the Holy Land – to lose heart. This Franciscan, in his two previous communications directed to the Custos, had demonstrated a decided enthusiasm for the Message and its bearer. His judgment was at first highly laudatory, so much so that his verdict was to advise the Custody to give serious consideration to the Message. However, following the adverse attitude of Rome, Vittorino Joannes, when again consulted, proves to be more than evasive, reticent and, in short, opposed to the position of the Fathers. How do we explain this change of attitude? We

leave Father Vittorino to deal with his conscience.

Giuseppe Napoli

Regarding the documents of Fr. Giuseppe (Giacinto) Napoli, one should note the manner in which he expresses what his encounter with *the slave of the Lord* and with the Message meant for him. His contact with the group at the Milk Grotto was his spiritual awakening and the rediscovery of his Christian and Franciscan vocation.

Napoli's documents highlight the decisive importance of the *collective* coming-to-consciousness in the three Franciscans.

Giuseppe Costantin

The documents relative to Giuseppe Costantin offer sufficient data for understanding his particular position.

Giuseppe Costantin was born in Egypt in 1939. He did his philosophical and theological studies in the Holy Land; he belongs to the Custody of the Holy Land, where he was ordained a priest, and he completed his higher studies in catechetics at the Catholic Institute of Paris. He has always felt moved by a desire to surpass himself. He has higher ideals regarding the religious life when compared with the usual level into which the fraternities frequently fall. This dissatisfaction with his situation favored his getting together with the other three friars.

Costantin, together with the other three Franciscans, participated in the joint petition for the "liberty" to translate into life their respective coming-to-consciousness. Costantin did not have the opportunity to become familiar with the

teachings of the Message, and did not participate as frequently as the others in the contacts with the Milk Grotto group. This probably influenced in a decisive way his final stance not to take the *leap* of leaving the Institution, as was indeed done by the other three friars.

The most obvious difference between Costantin and the other three friars stems from the fact that he did not feel an incompatibility between his spiritual search and the Institution; that is to say, what he was seeking was simply a *reform*. Instead, the three friars, with their petition for *total liberty*, were calling into question the religious Institution as such; expressed in absolute terms: Christ does not fit into any institution.

5. In their individual letters appearing under the title “Voice in the Desert”, the friars make their last attempt to be heard by the authorities; from their innermost depths, they feel the need to be understood. Once more they want to be explicit regarding their *coming-to-consciousness*. Each one separately makes a public confession of his quest from the tender age of entering the cloister up to the moment he happens to be living. At this stage in their lives, the four friars – two of them approaching old age and the other two already in their forties – reflect on the profound motivations that have accompanied them through the course of their existence.

6. In the last two documents, the friars manifest their definitive resolve regarding the difference they had had with the Institution. On one hand, Fr. Giuseppe Costantin, in his letter presented here as a “public declaration”, makes known his personal position before the Institution. Despite the fact that he holds to the criterion of the necessity for a total spiritual renewal, the truth is that he believes the hour has not yet arrived for him to take so decisive a step as that of leaving

the Institution – what we have called a leap into the void – as was indeed done by the other three friars.

It is exceedingly painful and tragic to say goodbye to one's entire individual and collective past, a goodbye that one knows is definitive, without the possibility of turning back – not a goodbye as if one were leaving the Institution in which one had lived a long time and were *going somewhere else*; the goodbye was definitive because the established was being abandoned to be replaced by *nowhere else*.

Along with the pain of their farewell is the sadness of knowing they were not understood, for there is no doubt that the Institution was unable, to be receptive; it did not really penetrate the heart of the matter: *liberty in order to be faithful to the Will of God*. The most beautiful gesture of the three friars – involving the greatest existential risk – met with total incomprehension. Here one could apply the words of Jesus when he tried to preach in Nazareth: “*No one is a prophet in his own country*”.

Despite the blindness of the ecclesiastical authorities, this *case of conscience* continues to be a call to all other religious that they in their turn may come to consciousness of the inauthenticity and falseness of the Institution; for it is clearly seen that to remain in the Institution is to deny Jesus Christ, since Jesus Christ and His Word are incompatible with the identification with the human, with the ego, with the world.

The farewell of the three friars has a resonance that transcends the walls of the Custody and the Roman Catholic Institution. In my opinion, the importance of this *case of conscience* is that it makes the Message known to the world; for this *case of conscience* not only unveils the errancy that inevitably accompanies every institution, every attempt to

establish man, but also, as spokesman for the Message, it is a call the Being is making to the species so that it may have clarity, *consciousness* of the Truth. *A Case of Conscience* is a warning made to all men in the sense that there is only one alternative left: either we decide for the Truth, the Being, the coming-to-consciousness, or we remain in errancy, in the unconsciousness, in falseness. This *case of conscience* is the clarion call that announces to mortals the manifestation of the Being: that it is indeed possible for man to live his concrete life in the house of the Being; but this clarion call also sounds at the end of time.

John the Baptist, the precursor of Jesus Christ, was a voice crying in the wilderness. Like the Baptist, Francis of Assisi was also a voice that cried out in the wilderness. The message of Lady Poverty was distorted when it was institutionalized. Francis was crying out for the Church to assume its total commitment and responsibility: to live the pure Gospel, which is the denial of self in order to fulfill the Will of the Father: "*If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself..*". Thus, it can be said that Francis is the precursor of this Message. And it falls to three Franciscans to listen to this call of Francis, "*for his consolation and rest*", inasmuch as this *case of conscience* is already the start of the *Revolution* lived by Jesus Christ, resumed by Francis and, today, made again into a life by *the slave of the Lord*.

I

PRESENTATION

“No one
after lighting a lamp
covers it over with a container,
or puts it under a bed;
but he puts it on a lampstand,
in order that those who come in
may see the light.

For
nothing is hidden
that shall not become evident,
nor anything secret
that shall not be known
and come to light.

Therefore take care how you listen
for whoever has, to him shall more be given;
and whoever does not have,
even what he thinks he has
shall be taken away from him.”

(Lk 8:16-18)

PRESENTATION

The publishing of the entire documentation concerning a delicate and complex case of conscience that has by now been drawn out over quite a number of years has the purpose of clarifying, with the greatest objectivity possible, the *significance*, the *motives*, and the *circumstances* of a decision that has matured in us very slowly and that we have made in fidelity to our conscience: the decision to place our liberty in *total, unconditional, and direct* dependence on the divine Will, surpassing the natural framework of the structured reality in which we are inserted, a reality we do not intend to disown, to which, rather, we give credit in part for having brought us to this point, but which now, as a result of this new coming-to-consciousness, manifests its essential limitations.

The decision made is not, on our part, a separation from our confreres in the Custody and in the Order, nor is it an attempt at reform. It is an act of surrender to the One who has called us precisely as Franciscans of the Holy Land to place ourselves at the exclusive disposal of His Will. Just as in following our vocation in our youth we separated ourselves materially from our parents and had to release ourselves from their authority without there having been any break in relations because of this, so too do we hope the same will now happen with those who feel responsible for us. We believe that this

new vocation, fulfillment of the first, is due to the same interior voice that calls us from within to a more complete surrender of ourselves to God, in which the *reality* of the religious profession¹ and of the priestly ministry¹, so we think, precisely consists.

In good conscience we have repeatedly requested that the liberty necessary for such unconditional submission to God be acknowledged by the authority. Now we realize that the consent of our superiors would have indeed immensely facilitated our leap into the void, legitimizing it in the eyes of men, but would have unloaded the responsibility and the consequences upon those who might not be in the position to assume them for lack of personal conviction. It was up to us, therefore, to draw out the practical consequences of the convictions we have come to, without expecting from *another creature* – no matter who it might be – the solution to our personal problem.

In the presence of a clear call from the Lord, all else must take second place (Mt 10:37-39), and we are convinced that it is precisely from Him that the invitation to a radical *conversion*, to a reversal of our orientation, comes to us: “*If you turn to the Lord with all your heart . . . direct your heart to the Lord and serve Him alone. . .*” (1 Sam 7:3).

What we have recently come to know and experience is one with the message of Christ and of the whole Biblical revelation; it is its concrete actualization for us. The Word of God, “*living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword*” and which “*penetrates and divides soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart*” (Heb 4:12), disclosed in the reading and meditation of the Sacred Scriptures, has been the power that has impelled us to lean on and believe only in this Word, after the example of

the experience of Abraham (Gn 12:1-3), of the Apostles (Jn 1:35-51), of Paul (Phil 3:7-14), of Francis, and of so many others. One and the same in all of them was the experience realized: all were taken by surprise by the events; the very same in all of them were the reactions so profoundly in contrast with the environment in which they found themselves; and, nevertheless, all of them were ready, in the midst of not a few contradictions, to reverse their orientation in an absolute act of faith, to *“return to Christ, shepherd and guardian of the souls “* (1 Pet 2:2 5), to seek *“first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”* (Mt 6:33), free and fragile, after the choice made, in pursuing the difficult path of the denial of themselves: *“You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light”* (Eph 5:8). *“Purge the old leaven, that you may be a new dough, as you really are without leaven... “* (1 Cor 5:7).

Our request for “liberty-for-God”, because of its novelty, has created – in those who on both sides have had to confront the problem – an objective conflict of consciences apparently unsolvable.

From our point of view, an understanding is possible on the basis of mutual respect for the conscience provided that the human authorities who represent the institution – conscious of the nature and purpose of the latter – were to come to a collective awareness of its subordination to a Will that manifests Itself as in Its proper place, in the intimate depths of personal conscience. The task of the institution – of the religious one as well – the purpose of the legislation that sustains it, and the function of the human authorities who embody it, is essentially, so we think, one of preparing individuals to the point in which they may be in a position to follow spontaneously and freely what they intuit to be the

Will of God, no longer external and heteronomous but an inner dynamic impulse, creative principle of new life (Jn 3:3-11), the only one capable of bringing to fulfillment the exigency of the Law (Rom 8:1-12). Whenever a similar case presents itself, the institution must yield its place to Life which urges and presses forth, and do so without regret, what is more, with the satisfaction of having fulfilled its own mission.

At any rate, we do not intend to judge anyone. We believe that each may have done and might be doing “his part” according to his own conscience. Our part is that of not being unfaithful, of not allowing ourselves to be unfaithful, to our profound inner conviction. Between the risk of an illusion and the risk of not doing everything that is within our possibilities in order to follow that which has all the signs and all the probabilities of being truly, with respect to us, the Will of God, we prefer to run the first risk, which at worst might bring as consequence a healthy humiliation that we accept in advance.

The publication for which we assume the responsibility is not a defense or an accusation of anyone; we have only wanted to present a *complete* documentation that might serve as a serious point of reference for anyone who might want to form a personal idea about this *case of conscience*. If at times, in the documents or in their introductory notes, affirmations are found whose contents refer in some way to personal facts, such affirmations have been made with the sole purpose of clarifying obscure points and equivocations or of rectifying inexact interpretations of the same. A possible reading in a polemic key is alien to the intention of those who have felt it their duty to make known, with objectivity, what has come about apart from any premeditated program.

We are confident that the experience of faith that today moves us to take this serious step – which, because of the complete reversal of values that it implies, may appear absurd and aberrant – will someday be seen and understood in its proper light by anyone who might find himself living the same experience. Our step is meant to be a “leap inwards”, a leap towards the vital center of our being.

José Barriuso
Raffaele Angelisanti
Giuseppe Napoli

Personal Reflections

“... a decision that has matured in us very slowly and that we have made in fidelity to our conscience: the decision to place our liberty in total, unconditional, and direct dependence on the divine Will” (p.53).

*“The decision “: It is that firm resolution not to conceal the presence of the Being – that firm resolution, the firmest of all, for it entails the greatest risk that a human being can take: to surrender himself to the Being and to cease to be in himself. From the moment this *decision* comes about, an energy irrupts within that leads one to be faithful in spite of himself.*

“Fidelity to our conscience”: to be what at each moment we are. That which we are at each moment is the manner in which the Being manifests Himself in us. Being faithful to conscience means not to conceal, in any way whatsoever, the manner in which what we are living at each moment is being revealed to us.

“The decision to place our liberty in total, unconditional, and direct dependence on the divine Will.” “To place”: In man, there is the possibility of deciding about himself; this is what is called liberty. When this liberty is used for the purposes of conserving and preserving the human entity, it is then free will. In free will, we ourselves are the main character; I live my life from me, by me, and for me. On the other hand, *“in total, unconditional, and direct dependence on the divine Will”*, we surrender our liberty to the Being. It is this

surrender of our liberty to the Being, not to another creature, that makes us free. Here we stumble upon the paradox of paradoxes: man's greatest expression of liberty is the surrender of his liberty to the Being. In this surrender, man lives his liberty as nothingness: nothingness and liberty are synonymous.

“Direct dependence”: this is one of the crucial issues in the difference between the three friars and the Custody of the Holy Land. The friars ask to be freed from their subjection to the principle of authority in matters concerning freedom of conscience. The Franciscan Institution, on the other hand, upheld the firm criterion – maintained with an iron hand by the Roman Catholic Institution – that obedience had to embrace all aspects of the life of the religious. Now then, the friars had entered fully into the spirit of the pivotal principle of the Message: the *unconditional submission* to the divine Will. *“Direct dependence”* means without the mediation of the human faculties: not through thought, nor will, nor affections; it is the man stripped of everything who can truly begin to live as a pilgrim.

“Dependence”: it is one thing to depend on an entity – be that a thing, a human entity, an institution, oneself, or one of the entities of the invisible world: this entails the nullifying of the individual; on the other hand, dependence on the Being means the only possible liberation for the individual. To depend essentially upon the creature is aberration, disorientation, fall, alienation, disgrace, misfortune.

“The divine Will”: this is what is called God, the Being, the Father. When man identifies himself with the Will, in this Will the transforming and redeeming energy is present. The Will takes one to the Realization, to praxis, to being faithful, to putting into practice and living what one says one is. The

Being as Will is the liberating energy: *“The Truth will make you free “*.

“... surpassing the natural framework of the structured reality in which we are inserted, a reality we do not intend to disown “(p. 53).

Our installation in the structures we have received from the historical and from the angelic constituted until now our field of activity; from the moment we decide for madness, that is to say, for surrendering ourselves to the Will, we transcend these structures of the world, and all other structures, no matter where they may originate.

“A reality we do not intend to disown “: which means that in spite of the fact that no structure of the world whatsoever can ever be taken as man’s legitimate house, it is true that while we are in this or another world, we will make use of structures. Every structure is an aberration, and nevertheless, the only path we have at our disposal for arriving at the Truth is to live the aberration as aberration.

Error is not the opposite of Truth but an integral part of it. The illusory (Buddhism), the image (the Message), insofar as they are representatives of the unreal, are legitimate, since they are for man the only path he possesses for arriving at the house of the Being. Error is not the same as falsehood; error is unconsciousness; falsehood, on the other hand, is taking error as if it were the Truth.

“...interior voice that calls us from within” (p.53).

In each one of us a little spark of the Being manifests itself. When we say that the Being constantly calls us, it means He is calling Himself. This hidden, unfathomable depth in man seeks, in turn, to break through all the barriers in order to go toward the Father, toward its place of origin. The Being calls

His particle (each human entity), and this particle cries out for its All. *“Come out of yourself completely for love of me and I will come out of Myself completely for love of you; what remains afterwards is the simple unity”* (Eckhart).

“In the presence of a clear call from the Lord, all else must take second place” (p.53).

When in one’s conscience the call of the Being is disclosed, when this call becomes urgent, everything else must take second place. This is the moment in which one decides to break with the world, the moment in which we become pilgrims of the Truth. *“He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me”* (Mt 10:37). *“The characteristic of a great virtue consists in its exclusive adherence to the Tao”* (Lao Tzu).

“What we have recently come to know and experience is one with the message of Christ and of the whole Biblical revelation; it is its concrete actualization for us” (p. 54).

“What we have recently come to know and experience”: What was recently known and experienced is the Message and the person who receives it. This Message was seen by the three friars as one with the Message of Jesus Christ and with the whole Biblical revelation, and moreover, as its concrete actualization. It is to be noted that the friars’ encounter with the Message and with *the slave of the Lord* was necessary in order to awaken in them the Spirit of the Gospel – a dormant word in the cells and corridors of the cloisters.

“...all were taken by surprise by the events” (p.54).

The experience of the three friars is kindred to that of Francis and that of the apostles, all of whom were taken by surprise by their encounter with the divine Reality in a most

concrete person: the apostles in Jesus, and the friars in Josefina.

This decision to follow the divine Reality wherever it manifests itself has always produced negative reactions in the milieu of those to whom it has manifested itself. It is not just the interplay of the vested interests of the moment that reject those who come to consciousness, but the rejection is due to a more profound reason: it is the struggle between the Institution and the Light, between the “prince of this world” and the Truth, between power and Grace. Nevertheless these oppositions have not been an obstacle, as in the case that concerns us, to the reversing of “*their orientation in an absolute act of faith*”, to “*return to Christ*”. This conversion, this complete about-face, can only be possible through an absolute act of faith. After this choice, the primordial liberty is recovered, beyond the institution, beyond the human, and the difficult path of the “denial of one’s self begins. “*You were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of the light*” (Eph 5:8).

“*Our request for liberty-for-God, because of its novelty...*” (p.54).

It is the first time in the annals of the Roman Catholic Institution that a case like this has occurred, for this petition does not seek to create a new reform in order to amend the Institution, but it is rather a call for each individual to awaken and to listen directly to the call of God in his conscience. It is not a revolution that is being proposed on the level of the Institution as such, rather it is a direct call to the individual conscience.

II

AN INTERVENTION OF THE BEING

Documents 1-5

The history of the spiritual experience, the documentation of which is presented here, has its very beginning in the month of December, 1966. The incident is the meeting of Fr. José Barriuso with Señorita Josefina Chacín during the exercise of his ministry as a guide for pilgrims visiting the Holy Places. The fortuitous meeting, which later would have unsuspected developments, is described in all its details in Father Barriuso's letter of June 16, 1972, to the Discretorium of the Holy Land (cf. document 4, p. 81) and in the Letter to the Franciscans of the Holy Land from Señorita Josefina, dated August 31, 1977 (cf. doc. 17, p.138).

Opening the documentation is a letter from Señorita Josefina in which she let Father Barriuso know that the writings that he was presenting, the publication of which he was in charge, had to be presented as a divine intervention.

We publish this letter – despite the privacy of its contents which reveal personal experiences of a mystical-spiritual nature – because familiarity with it constitutes the necessary premise for the comprehension and appreciation of the development of the events that followed, beginning with the steps taken by Father Barriuso in addressing himself to the superiors of his Order.¹

¹*These chronicle notes that introduce the documents are a guiding thread that accompany and integrate the single documents. They have been written by the same friars who have published *Un Caso di Coscienza*, and they help the reader to reconstruct, at least in part, the process of their spiritual evolution.*

DOCUMENT 1

June 27, 1969

Rev. Fr. José Barriuso
Jerusalem – Israel

Very esteemed Father Barriuso,

On the 18th of the present month, the Lord made known to me that, concerning the books which you are presenting – “*Yo’ en Cristo Resucitado*” [“‘I,’ in Christ Arisen”], “*Viviendo el Evangelio*” [“Living the Gospel”], and “*Peregrinación del Pueblo de Dios*” [“Pilgrimage of the People of God”] with the explanations of the drawings – it must be made known to the world that this is a matter of a “message” from God, a call to men so that they may know the truth and dispose themselves to enter through His Mercy before His Justice manifests itself. *It is important and necessary that the world know that it is a matter of a Divine intervention.* This is what I have understood the Lord desires. In order to be faithful to the truth, nothing occurs to me other than to copy textually for you, as I have it written in my notebook in the moment in which I received it from the Lord, some of the knowledge expressed in these books; for now that I know the Scriptures, I cannot present it as I received it then when I had not read them. The Sacred Scriptures have come to be a verification for me of everything the Lord has made known to me in my most absolute ignorance of the word of God.

After the Lord placed the Sacred Scriptures in my hands, He Himself has directed me in order that I might be able to explain the drawings by basing myself on them. I began to

receive this “knowledge” from the Lord since the 22nd of August, 1954, which was when He revealed Himself to me, making known to me who God is and who I am (the ALL and the “nothingness”), and which was what totally changed my life, my desiring nothing else since then than to fulfill His Divine Will.

And it was that day in Jerusalem at the temple esplanade, when you were explaining to us the Scriptures regarding Solomon’s Temple, that the Lord let me know that I should show you the drawings I had brought to Jerusalem. When I showed you the drawings and you told me that you had been hoping for something like that for the explanation of the holy places to the pilgrims who go to the Holy Land, I understood that the Lord wanted “something” of and with you. And afterwards, when I began the layout of the book “Peregrination del Pueblo de Dios”, He Himself made known to me that He had chosen you to present His “message” to the world. The rest you are acquainted with.

Immediately following, I am copying textually for you, as I have it written in my notebook, the notes that I made when I received from the Lord this knowledge regarding the drawings and the books – the sense of what is expressed in them.

The drawings and their understanding

St. Mary of the Angels (Assisi) Italy:
May 10, 1956 (Ascension Thursday), 10:00 a.m.
Convent of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary
(Room No. 7)

Last night, after saying my prayers I could not sleep.

Suddenly I felt a soft breeze that invaded the whole room. The two doors were closed, and this room has no windows. A brightness came on, and I heard a voice saying to me: "Look who you are," and I saw myself so small that I felt I was nothing. Once again the voice said to me: "Have you seen yourself? Well, then, don't forget it." And after a few moments, I "saw" two personages dressed in white who, approaching me, were saying to me: "By will of Him who was, who is, and who will be, come." And they took me to where there was a most beautiful woman, all dressed in white, and smiling at me, she took me by the hand, followed by the first two personages (the ones who had brought me) and others who were with her. She took me toward a resplendent light that had the form of a triangle and the color of the sun when it is setting. It (the triangle) emitted rays of all colors. Many voices could be heard, and I could hear a voice saying: "This is the Beginning and the End; it is the Father and it is the Son, because it is one Spirit." And other voices were saying: "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of Hosts: filled are the heavens with the majesty of your glory."

The light flooded me completely, and I saw everything clearly. I saw many dwelling places along the sides of the triangle, and in the front part a large one that was closed. Showing me the first dwelling place which was all filled with light and in the center of which was a lamb, a voice said to me: "This is the Lamb who by His own will is confined here until all His children are saved."

Then I was shown the second dwelling place where there were many people dressed in white with palms in their hands, and the voice said to me: "These are they who have shed their blood for the Lamb: they remain here until the number of their brothers is completed."

And I was shown the third dwelling place where there were many divisions; and the voice said to me: "These are the children of the Lamb who have not yet finished fulfilling their mission and wait for the coming of the hour."

And upon our passing by the middle dwelling place, the voice said to me: "This is the dwelling place prepared for the Lamb, where no one has yet entered; happy are they who, when the hour strikes and its doors open, are with the Lamb and witness His entry."

Upon our arriving at the other side of the triangle, the voice said to me: "Look at these dwelling places and keep to yourself what you have seen, because this is the entrance of the Lamb."

(In these "visions", God made known to me the invisible things, those that one cannot see with the eyes of the body. In that which follows, He made known to me the visible things, but what I learned of them is also invisible to the eyes of the body because it is the spiritual reality of matter. Thus then, neither one nor the other can be understood except in a vision of faith. The drawings are only symbols or a figure of the reality which cannot be expressed with the bodily senses.)

Then I was shown a roundness, and the voice said to me: "Thus is it: write and draw what you have seen and as you have seen it."

And I. .in the awareness of what I was, of what I am, and of what I will be, imploring the help of the Lord, write and draw what I saw and as I saw it: I saw a roundness illuminated in almost all its parts by the rays of light emitted by the triangle that I saw before. There were in it many roads, and all of them were converging towards the triangle, but none of the people who were going along these roads could get to the

triangle without passing through a road narrower than the others and which was found towards the center of the triangle and in the middle of the road closest to this; it was something like the entrance door. Among all these roads, I saw a very narrow one that went directly to the center of the triangle where the narrowest of all was to be found, that is, the entrance through which all those who wished to enter had to pass. All the roads were full of gold-colored stones, which were an obstacle for getting to the door. These stones came out of some bags attached to a fishhook pulled by a string that was held by a horrible animal that roamed through the roundness accompanied by many soldiers disguised in every way. (Represented in these disguises I saw all the attractions of this world, even the best and most wholesome things that separate man from God; everything that separates man from God is temptation of Satan.) This animal (representation of Satan) and his soldiers were gleeful to see how the inhabitants of the roundness fell into their nets. They were especially concerned about guarding the widest road that was closest to the triangle where, with the piling up of the stones, those who were going along this way were not seeing the light that illumined them from-above because they were blinded by the smoke given off by the little stones. Some who were going along this way and who could still see were keeping to the sides because they were afraid of the soldiers of the stones, who bared their teeth at them so that they would not alert the others to get them to remove from the main road the stones, which was what blocked the entrance to the paternal house. This created a great confusion among all the inhabitants of the roundness, and having the light, they were not seeing, and so those who believed they were going forward were actually going backward. I cannot describe the very horrible things I saw.

Then I was again shown the roundness, and the voice said to me: "Thus will it be: write and draw what in the dark you have seen, and what in the light you have understood keep secret in your heart until the hour and the moment arrives; whosoever has eyes, let him see; whosoever has ears, let him hear."

And I. . . in the awareness of what I was, of what I am, and of what I will be, imploring the help of the Lord, write and draw what I saw and as I saw it: I again saw the roundness, which had grown dark in all its parts except for one; what I saw in it is kept in my heart until the hour and the moment arrives for it to be revealed. In the darkness, I saw the throne of the ferocious animal, with seven heads, sitting on the stones that he had piled up and at his side all those men who had helped him. The roads were desolate; palms and crosses were to be seen everywhere; and the animal with seven heads took delight in what he believed to be his triumph, and with him all those who, being blind, did not see the light that had been sent to them. Only for a short time did his false reign last. And what I later saw in the light remains in darkness for those who do not wish to see. Let him who has eyes, see.

And the voice said to me: "Come and you will see the final state of the roundness. Write and draw what you have seen in it and as you have seen it."

And I. . . in the awareness of what I was, of what I am, and of what I will be, imploring the help of the Lord, write and draw what I saw and as I saw it: I saw a part of the roundness (for the other part had disappeared). This part that I saw was radiant with light, set within a heart, and in it all those who had not followed the animal with the seven heads.

And the voice said to me: "Do you want to see where the

animal and his own are?”

And what I then saw was so horrible that it made me shudder, and I didn't want to look anymore.

And the voice said to me: “Again you will be taken back to where you were, and you will be what you were; do not forget what you have seen and what you were, if you want to be what you now are.”

And again I felt as tiny as nothing.

(This was the start of the drawings.)

“I”, in Christ Arisen

Madrid, Spain, April 13, 1965

On the 10th of April, I was in Avila by Will of the Lord. On the night of that day, Saturday, eve of Palm Sunday, I was very tired for having made a long trip, and I went to bed early, before nine. At two o'clock in the morning, I awoke invaded by the light of the Lord. In that light, I had a clear understanding of the journey of the souls from the moment they come into this world, their thirst for happiness, and the dangers to which they expose themselves seeking this happiness where it is not. Even though it was a little cold and I didn't feel like getting up to write what I understood, I could not remain in bed and had to write. (What I wrote were the lines or stanzas of the journey of the soul, as it appears in the book “I, in Christ Arisen”.) Between the understanding I had and the writing, almost two hours had passed, for the love of God invaded me even to the pores of my body and my whole soul, and with each understanding, I could do nothing but pray in thanksgiving and praise to His infinite Justice and

Goodness.

When I thought it was all over and was getting ready to sleep, I felt the presence of St. Theresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross. This was not a corporeal presence that I could see with the eyes of my body. It was a spiritual presence, but very real, and I was perceiving it with my soul, if it can be said in this way. They said to me – I believe it was St. John of the Cross: “It is God’s Will that you write what you have understood.” (It was a matter of the explanation of the verses that I had written.) Neither was this a voice that I could perceive with my ears; it was, rather, a comprehension from within. I understood that he was referring to an explanation of the verses or stanzas that I had written under the light of the Lord, and that I should also write their explanation as I had understood it (which I did from that very day, and I finished on Easter Sunday).

St. Theresa spoke to me of the Carmelite Order reformed by her. She told me that the Order was very lax, that the “world” was inside the cloisters, that, they had remained with many external things but had almost totally forgotten the spirit; that some were thinking of a new reform to remedy the evil, but that this would not happen because the true reform needed in all the church is personal – of each one; that this is why a universal purification would come; that the pure Gospel must be lived... When she told me this, in an instant I saw something like an immense, very-clear river. This river, or this water, sprang forth from the cross. From this river, something like channels came forth, but I saw that all of them were almost dry, that in each one of these channels there were only a few puddles of water left where some little fishes were jumping about (this is the motif of the cover of “Living the Gospel”). I understood that these channels represented

the different religious Orders, for I saw in them all their founders. I understood the significance of the little puddles of water to be what in those Orders was left of the Spirit of the Gospel, which is the ONLY positive THING for God; the little fishes signified the souls who were living it or who desired to truly live it.

I saw that from the center of the cross, source from which the river was forming, there came forth a thread of water that made its way in the midst of those branches or channels that had dried up, but which at the end was left as if stifled, for dry channels, like the others, developed. I understood that this thread of water, which made its way among the channels, signified the “message” that Francis was bringing to men, the Spirit of the Gospel (what he called “Lady Poverty”). I did not see Francis among the founders; it was as if his “person” “became lost in this thread of water, becoming buried in the Cross when he understood what men were doing with that Order, which was no less than the Lord’s Message to all men and to the whole Church; this is why the thread of water remained without drying up, like an “open way” for the salvation of the militant Church. It was the Justice of God’s Love for what Francis had accomplished, his fidelity to God. I understood in an instant what happened in the soul of this man and how he was “absorbed” by the Crucified Lord. It seems as if that Cross attracted him and buried him in its innermost. I do not know how to express this mystery of God’s Love with a soul who gives herself completely.

In an instant, for all this was happening all at once, in a most clear and detailed understanding but with the rapidity of lightning, I saw, or understood, that all the founders of the different religious Orders recognized in St. Francis something like an example or guide for their Orders. And I

understood that all of them directed toward that thread of water (the spirit of the Gospel, “Lady Poverty”) those puddles of water with the little fishes that were in their channel, so that through it, and like Francis, they might become lost in the Cross. For a wave of mud, like lava from a volcano come forth from the earth, was sweeping down like an avalanche upon all the channels (the religious orders). I understood that this mud signified the “spirit of the world”, wielded by the ANTI-CHRIST, which aimed at the militant church, directly at consecrated souls, and was coming by means of the “authority”. I saw that from these souls who were “becoming lost” in the Cross (who identified themselves with it) through this thread of water (the spirit of the Gospel), a fountain of “living water” would spring forth – the most pure Church, as the Lord wants it, totally nourished by the Spirit of His Gospel and guided by Him, Himself.

Everything else I understood are the same things that the Lord has made known to me with respect to the church. All this happened from two o’clock in the morning until six. When the clock was striking the hour, I was returning to the reality of this world, because before this it seemed that, although my body was here, I was not. One of the things I understood was that all habits, etc., of the religious life should be done away with, that souls consecrated to the Lord must have only one habit: His LIVED Gospel; their Spirit would distinguish them from the others. I also understood that in order to adore God in Spirit and in truth, every impediment that might keep us from this adoration of God in Spirit and in truth had to be eliminated.

“Living the Gospel”

On December 15, 1965, I was, by Will of the Lord, in San Giovanni Rotondo (Foggia), Italy. And there, the Lord made known to me that I should write down the Gospels and their explanations as the Lord Himself was giving me to understand it, and in the order in which I was receiving it, which is how it appears in the book and booklets. Even though the wording is mine and has my deficiencies, the sense of what I have wished to express in them is the Lord's, and to this I bear witness, and so will He when the time comes.

With what I have here written you, I believe that I have complied, according to my conscience, with what I have understood the Lord is asking of me. *You* may make of this whatever use you believe is God's Will.

Yours truly,

the slave of the Lord

“Personal Reflections

“It is important and necessary that the world know that it is a matter of a Divine intervention” (p.64).

One of the most outstanding aspects that appear in the Message is what is mentioned here when it speaks of “Divine intervention”. The traditional sacred books, for example, the Vedas, the Gita, the Bible, the Koran, were the result of a revelation of the Being to man. In these *revelations*, the human being was offered the path for arriving at the Truth; these were possible ways which the human entity had to follow in order to attain his *Realization*. Revelation, unlike “Divine intervention”, means *word of the Being* addressed to the human entity so that he might take it up and make it his life. On the other hand, when in the Message “Divine intervention” is spoken of, this means that it is the Being Himself who is to intervene directly in human affairs. It is the Being Himself who will take hold of the reins. No longer will it be a matter of the human being’s surrendering to the Being in order to fulfill the Will, but rather the Will Itself will become the protagonist of our lives. The surrender, therefore, is now total and unrestricted; man no longer *does* the Work, but rather he himself *is* the Work. That is to say, the human entity is to identify himself completely with the Being so that it may be the Being Himself who acts in him.

This intervention of the Being, announced in the Message, signals the most spectacular event ever since the Creation of

the visible and invisible worlds, since this intervention marks the end of time; it is the last opportunity we human beings have to choose and to make a life of the truth of our own election: accepting or rejecting the intervention of the Being in our lives through the denial or the affirmation of our ego. Today precisely, we are living the peak moment of man's evolution in his power of election; this evolution is ending. We have only one alternative left: either we reconcile ourselves with the Being, or else we remain in the "non-being".

I know this sounds like a super paradox, and nevertheless, the Being Himself is to manifest Himself by taking human destiny directly into His own hands. In her conversations with me, the person who receives the Message has expressed herself in a clear and unquestionable way: "The Message is the fulfillment of all the previous revelations of the Being, since now it is the Being Himself who is going to act directly." She continues by saying: "Naturally, the Being does not bypass man's liberty in order to act in him; this is why it is of supreme importance that the human being *consciously* make his *election*: rejecting the Divine intervention in him or making a direct, total, and unconditional surrender of his will to the Being."

When speaking here of the human entity's identification with the Being, by virtue of the surrender of his liberty to the Being, one might think that what is being proposed is the downgrading of the human entity, his total disparagement. It is just the opposite: identifying himself totally with the Being, completely stepping aside so that He may be the One Who acts, is the highest Realization and consecration of the human entity, since this surrender makes it possible for the Being to manifest Himself in the Man. Nothing more positive can happen to us than to reach this complete and total identifica-

tion of the human with the Being, given the fact that the true essence of man is the Being Himself.

“I began to receive this ‘knowledge’ from the Lord since the 22nd of August, 1954...” (p.64).

This “knowledge” is not just any kind of knowledge; it is not the result of the efforts of the human faculties, nor does it come from any of the beings of the invisible world. In this sense this “knowledge” can never be confused with esotericism, since it comes from a direct encounter with the Being.

In contrast to this “knowledge”, what science could offer us would concern partial aspects relative to the sphere of the sensible. On the other hand, this revealed knowledge refers to the ultimate realities of life.

The authenticity of the revelations is to be confirmed by the unrestricted, total, and direct surrender to the Will, of the person who has had the experience of the Being. The person who receives this “knowledge” is not to derive any personal benefit from it. In his everyday life, this person is to be a living example of his total self-offering to the Being. This also distinguishes this “knowledge” from esotericism, magic, mental power, etc., for this “knowledge” cannot be manipulated or stored in the memory. Apart from this, one of the most eloquent ways to disqualify reason is to bring out the effective and indubitable presence of invisible worlds, adding, of course, that the Being cannot be represented either by the visible or by the invisible.

“He Himself made known to me that He had chosen you to present His ‘message’ to the world” (p.65).

José Barriuso was chosen by the Being to present the “message” to the world. And indeed all the books of the

“message” prior to the work *The “New Earth”* were presented by Barriuso.

Here it is well to indicate that the Being also chooses those who are to serve as instruments so that the “message” might reach men. On the one hand, *the slave of the Lord* is the principal vehicle through whom the Being directly expresses His “message”. Then the Being Himself begins to place in the path of *the slave of the Lord* those who are to put into practice His designs. It is also well to accentuate the fact that the “message” as well as the way of carrying it out depend, at least for the moment, on the instruments the Being designates. This means that it is necessary that the person chosen by the Being accept, in a total and unconditional way, the surrendering of himself to the Being. In the first place, it is absolutely necessary that *the slave of the Lord* be completely surrendered to the Being, that there not be in her the slightest chance of wavering in the face of this surrender. The same applies to the other instruments. This means that the axis around which the “message” revolves is the disposition we are to have of unconditionally surrendering ourselves to the Being.

Now then, it is not that the instrument, Barriuso for example, blindly accepts what *the slave of the Lord* says to him regarding the fact that he has been chosen by the Being. Barriuso accepts, let us say, the invitation, because in himself, in the depths of his being, he feels the call of the Being. That is to say, the Being calls Barriuso through *the slave of the Lord*, and he graciously responds to the call. Thus in the instrument, in his turn, a revelation of the Being takes place.

“Thus then, neither the one nor the other can be understood except in a vision of faith” (p.66).

Faith is the unconditional surrender to the Being as regards

one's *knowing* relative to definitive convictions about the universe and life. The central point of faith consists in the conviction one has that the Being is the Truth, that the Being is the Being. This "knowledge" does not come from the efforts of our human mind, but it is the Being Himself who gives it to us – it is a gift. Along with this "knowledge" about the Being Himself, there is also a knowledge that is received as an explanation for the sensible universe and the invisible worlds as well as of the place man occupies among the creatures.

"In that light, I had a clear understanding of the journey of the souls..." (p.69).

The reformulation of the theme of the soul has great importance for the man of today, since the soul in the human entity represents the Being Himself. Only on the basis of accepting that the soul is the essence of man can the path be cleared for our encounter and discovery of what we in essence are. There is no other way to speak of Truth if one does not accept the indubitable reality of the soul. Today the reformulating of the theme of the soul is to be done with much discretion, with much care, as one would speak to a child or an adolescent about a subject that is considered to be of decisive importance, but about which only information that discredits and disqualifies its reality has been received.

Father Barriuso, after having taken on the responsibility of the writings that had been entrusted to him, and after having seen to their publication, sends a copy to the General Minister of the Order, Father Constantino Koser.

Along with the books, he sends the following letter in which he makes a brief but satisfactory exposition of their doctrinal content, giving a reading key for the right understanding of what from now on, for the sake of simplicity and brevity, we will call the “Message”.

Following Father Barriuso’s letter is the Father General’s reply.

DOCUMENT 2

Rome, March 25, 1971

Most Reverend Father General
Via Santa Maria Mediatrice
Rome

Most Reverend Father:

I am in Rome on my way back to Jerusalem, my permanent residence for the last twenty-three years.

I am taking the opportunity of my stopover in Rome to introduce to you – delivering them into your hands – some books, the publication of which has kept me busy during three months of my vacation time in Spain, plus an additional five months due to difficulties that arose in the printing.

The content of these books is a “message” that the Lord sends to men in these moments of widespread anguish and difficulties. There are four titles: “I”, *in Christ Arisen; Pilgrimage of the People of God; Living the Gospel; Pilgrimage of the People of God – Explanation of the Drawings*. These have been joined by two others, the first entitled *Sal de ella, pueblo mío [Come out of her, my people]*, announcement of the “message”, the second entitled *Un Mundo Según el Corazón de Dios [A World According to the Heart of God]*, a meditation based on the contents of the “message”.

Together they constitute a body of coherent doctrine developed around what in all of them is the central point – THE WILL OF GOD: Everything was ordained to this – that man as a free creature might freely cooperate with God in the

accomplishment of His Designs, to which cooperation He was calling him from the beginning of creation. If all this has been the reality actually pursued by God with man and creation since the beginning, the moment is coming when men may come to a consciousness of this their role in God's Designs and may, at last, freely and consciously fulfill the Will of God. For humanity taken collectively, the fulfillment of God's Will means the coming of God's Kingdom in which no other will than the Will of God will exist. By Will of God, apart from the saints who have understood it correctly (otherwise they would not be saints), we have been coming to understand, in a very vague and imprecise manner, man's righteous way of acting according to his reason. In reality, this is how it is, but because of its impreciseness, it has often been difficult for us to distinguish between God's Will and God's Permission. Everything is God's Will, but what God wants is one thing and what He permits is another; what God does by means of men who act in faith is one thing, and what men, determined by their own will, do in the "power" of God is another. It is all about two quite different ways – the "way of faith" and the "way of reason" or, in other words, the "way of love" and the "way of power". God calls us to realize ourselves in the "way of love", which presupposes a personal renunciation of our realization in the "way of power" by which we have all begun our march from the very first moments of our existence, aiming to live our lives in the zone of sin, of separation from God.

A clarity about this, as we had not had it until now, is what these books bring us. It is not a matter of a new revelation, but of a directing of the whole light of revelation toward the illumination of points that up until now had not been seen in this form, despite the fact that all these things have been left

for us in the Scriptures. In Scripture itself the declaration of many things is remitted to another moment, and Jesus also left us word of this very thing. It matters not that this clarification demands a rectification of many of our positions. It is an exigency of the Gospel and of the truth. Therefore, it will be, rather, a going beyond or a passing from seeing things on a purely rational plane to seeing them in the spiritual order, to the revelation of which God's gift of His "word" was ordained. For this reason, all that is affirmed in these books is justified on the basis of Revelation as it is made known to us in the Sacred Scriptures. In Scripture, what is really made known to us are the spiritual realities such as our rational and sensible world is expecting. We are not to look for these spiritual realities in order to justify this our world in which we find ourselves, explaining them from its standpoint, but rather we are to understand this our world from the standpoint of the spirit which is made known to us in Revelation. This change of perspective and the demanded rectification in our way of acting are something very important which must be kept in mind with respect to this message .

These books represent an answer to the most widespread issues at the present moment. They constitute a discovery of the spiritual realities, discovery at which, in a general manner and collectively, we had not arrived. The meaning of our lives and of everything that surrounds us gains, in the light of these spiritual realities, a transparency that it did not have before and which is lacking to very many in these present moments. The discovery of God's Designs, which in these books is given to us on the basis of Revelation, is extremely extensive. The horizons that open up to man are limitless.

The books have been written by a person whom the Lord has taken as instrument in order to transmit this knowledge to

men. As for the regulations in force on publishing books of this nature, if they are still in effect, they have all been complied with. The writings have been read and approved by Monsignor Friar Francisco Aldegunde, Archbishop of Tangier. He has even permitted me to take the name of his printing house as the one responsible so that the validity of the “imprimatur” might extend wherever the books are printed. The Father Custos of the Holy Land, whose jurisdiction I am under, has approved them – the two I was able to present to him in Jerusalem. The other two, which I could not show him there, have been approved’ by my Provincial (the provincial of the Province of St. James, to which I belong). This last part has been done with perhaps a rather broad interpretation, but not without basis, for we religious who are in the Holy Land, according to the regulations in force, continue to belong to the respective provinces even if we find ourselves in the Holy Land at its service, so that on the part of the Order as well as on the part of the Church the legislation has been complied with. Moreover, on the part of the Bishop, it may well be interpreted as an exercise of collegiality. They have all, likewise, been examined and approved by Father Manuel Miguéns, as it appears in the books themselves. In Jerusalem, the Patriarch did not approve them, and this is why they had to be printed in Spain.

I take the opportunity that this letter affords me during my stopover in Rome to greet you and present my respects. I wish you all the best in the Lord and ask your blessing.

Friar José Barriuso

DOCUMENT 3

CURIA GENERALIS
Ordinis Fratrum Minorum
Via S. Maria Mediatrice,
25 Roma

April 7, 1971

Rev. Fr. José Barriuso, O.F.M.
Jerusalem

Reverend Father,

I am truly grateful for the books that you, on your stopover in Rome, have sent me.

In your letter, you explain their contents and fundamental purpose: that God's Will may be better known and applied, fulfilled. The "*change of perspective*" and "*the demanded rectification in our way of acting*", encompassing many, will be the best reward for the effort that the works entail – precisely the one I desire for you.

Wishing you also a deep participation in the Easter mystery, I send you a special Seraphic blessing.

Friar Constantino Koser, O.F.M.
Minister General

With the letter that follows, Father Barriuso, after having made his experience known to the superiors of the Custody, expresses to them his inner exigency to devote himself to spreading the Message.

The understanding shown by the Discretorium of the Holy Land, as it appears from the reply given, encouraged Father Barriuso to follow the suggestion received – that of addressing himself to the Father General from whom, however, he obtained no reply.

DOCUMENT 4

Bethlehem, June 16, 1972

Most Rev. Father Custos and
Discretorium of the Holy Land
St. Saviour's Monastery
Jerusalem

Most Reverend Father,

The purpose of this letter is to make known to you something that the Lord is asking of me at this time.

Before I go any further, I will allow myself to briefly explain the facts that are at the basis, origin, and full development of my initiative to present myself to Your Paternity with a request such as the one contained in this writing.

I came into the service of the Custody of the Holy Land in

December of 1948, from the Province of St. James in Spain, sent by my superiors. Since then I have continued in the Custody, lending my services for a period of 24 years.

In 1955, the first six years of my service in the Custody were completed. Of those six years, I spent the first one and almost all of the last two in the Holy Sepulchre. The rest of the time, I carried out various duties of a provisional nature.

I do not know if it was because of the provisional nature of my assignment to the various tasks that I did not learn any of the languages needed here. Perhaps because of this I began to feel useless for doing anything here at the service of the Custody. At the end of the six years, I was in the situation of knowing no other language than my own.

I was assigned to Capharnaum. It seemed to me I could not take over this position because I would have to be alone in it without knowing any language. Because of this, and seeing that here I found no solution to the problem of what I could do at the service of the Custody, I requested that I be sent to the Holy Sepulchre with the hope of there spending the time I lacked for completing the six years, term for which we were sent from the provinces to the Holy Land. This was immediately granted me.

During the time of my stay at the Holy Sepulchre, it was proposed to me that I go to Nicosia as Superior to take the place of a Spaniard. Not knowing any Greek, it seemed to me that I could not honestly accept this post. While the Discretorium was meeting, a pilgrim asked to see the Father Custos, I being the one who introduced him. At the end of the visit, which was very brief, Father Custos informed me of what was being discussed with regard to me, which was an opportunity for me to express what I thought. I remember

saying to him that if such was his wish, he could send me to Cyprus, but I could not accept going as Superior. He argued that he had no one else to send, and he had to send a Spaniard. I retorted that I was disposed to give him in writing the renunciation of my right to the post, which, according to the Statutes¹ of the Custody, fell to me as a Spaniard, so that he could justify his non-compliance with the obligation to send a Spaniard there, if there was no other Spaniard to send besides me. It turned out that I was not sent.

I was also offered another solution during this period, that of going to Rome to teach Latin at the International College. It did not seem to me that I should accept this either since, to me, that was not the Holy Land. In view of all this, I came to the conviction that since I could not be useful to the Custody because of my lack of languages, my duty was to return to my Province. This did not appeal to me at all, but I decided to go through with this resolve.

This is how I explained it to the then Custos, Fr. Giacinto Faccio, in March of 1955. He, as well as my superior in the Holy Sepulchre, Fr. Leonardo Donnalioia, dissuaded me from this and tried to convince me that I could still be useful in the Custody. The Father Custos proposed to me that I stay on to guide the Spanish-speaking pilgrims, since there was always a need for someone to do this. For this work, I was assigned to Gethsemani. I had already, off and on, guided some pilgrims, and I enjoyed this. I therefore remained in the Custody, fully dedicated to this work from then on.

I continued in this until 1971 when, in the Chapter, I was removed from this occupation. My assignment to Bethlehem has been a time of meditation on the ways of God. I am coming to understand that this very fact has its significance for me, for it means a break without which it would have been

difficult for me to see the Will of God. God wanted to take me out of a given setting in order to pass me on to another. Interiorly, I had already had a forewarning of this in a certain phenomenon of weariness that I felt, which was extraordinarily accentuated with my mother's passing away in May, 1971; but had I continued in that other assignment, I would hardly have understood this. It is in this light that I have been able to see what the change of assignment meant for me. This view was made possible by my break with the previous situation and my meditation on the events that, in the practice of my priestly ministry in favor of the pilgrims, have followed one after the other.

During these 16 years of my ministry on behalf of the pilgrims within the setting of the Custody's activities, I had felt, right up to the point that I mention above, fully satisfied with my work. I was allowed to move along with full freedom of action and initiative. Thanks to this, I can say that, in my work, I was finding myself, feeling as though I were realizing myself.

During the time of this process, which lasted 16 years, my experiences and performance gradually matured and became refined. I would read and study so that I could each day be more useful to the pilgrims and could better explain the Word of God. The wealth that was manifesting itself to me in the Word of God captivated me. With regard to a more efficacious action, I came to make personal syntheses of what seemed to me essential, adapting it to whatever length of time the pilgrims were spending in the Holy Land. Little by little, this led them to a personal reading and offered them the unitary vision that allows us to see ourselves encompassed in these events as in an adventure that is not foreign to us and belonging only to the Jewish People, but that affects us all.

Thus, in my experiencing this process, my activity in the work entrusted to me gradually unfolded. All of it materialized in a small pamphlet that I had to prepare in order to orient the pilgrimage to the Holy Land of a homogeneous group who came to the Holy Land to celebrate its fifty years since the beginning of its activities as a group. Immediately after, I was asked to organize another, larger group of about 500 people. I amplified for them the previous pamphlet and printed it as a manuscript, distributing it to each of those who came here. We kept the plates of what had been given as the program, and it was printed again, becoming finalized in the book *Peregrinación a Tierra Santa [Pilgrimage to the Holy Land]*, appearing in 1963.

The scope of this work was in all respects very limited and imperfect. It still did not satisfy what my experience was requiring of me as necessary and what I knew the pilgrims desired and were seeking. What pilgrims principally desire when they come to the Holy Land is something that may afford them a general view of the history of salvation and that, beyond seemingly isolated and unconnected facts which are recalled and elicited in the course of a tour through the Holy Places, may allow them to attain to the ultimate spiritual reality which all these things and their very sequence signify. When their visit to the Holy Land does not give them this, they go back home disappointed. Many are those to whom this has happened.

In this program of action, in December of 1966, I met a pilgrim and this meeting, seen at a distance of six years, signifies for me today, in my opinion, the answer given by God to my desires, aspirations, and limitations. I shall briefly summarize how this happened.

From Cairo, Father Castor had sent a lady to me, recom-

mending that she be accompanied on her visit to the Holy Places. This lady was Spanish. She had a defect in one of her legs that did not permit her to walk well. We were leaving the Casa Nova¹ in order to carry out our programmed visit to the Temple Esplanade when another lady, from Venezuela, who was there, approached us and offered to accompany us, doubtlessly to escort the lady who was leaving with me to visit the Temple. It seemed like a good idea because of the difficulty that the Spanish woman had in walking. With the irregular streets in Jerusalem, she could use the help of an arm to lean on.

At the Temple Esplanade, I was explaining with Sacred Scripture everything related to the Temple when suddenly the Venezuelan pilgrim said to me: “Father, the Lord wants me to show you something.” I did not consider it important, and I seem to recall that I did not even answer her. Returning to the Casa Nova after the visit, the Spanish lady sent by Father Castor argued that we Christians had nothing to do with the Old Testament. This gave us the opportunity to continue talking about the same theme of the Scriptures.

Having arrived at the Casa Nova, the Venezuelan pilgrim again said to me: “Father, the Lord wants me to show you some drawings,” and she went to look for them in order to show them to us. Upon seeing them and hearing something of their meaning, without having fully understood them except very superficially, I – from the standpoint of my own concerns in the problems of accompanying pilgrims – said to her, “I was hoping for something like this.” Of course I was not referring to what she was showing me because I had never heard of it, yet more than once the desire for a graphic representation of the Biblical message had indeed passed through my mind.

As a result of this meeting, the Venezuelan lady who brought the drawings stayed in Jerusalem nine months, telling me that this was what God was asking. In all this time, I spoke with her daily about these things, coming to form for myself an idea, still very superficial, of what this could mean. My knowledge deepened in my contact with her as I gradually came to realize how God, in fact, acts in a soul when she surrenders herself totally in faith.

Thus I came to see that in all that had happened, as well as in this aspiration of mine, it was not just a matter of a personal desire of mine to better serve the pilgrims who come to the Holy Land, but that God is *concretely* speaking through these events to all humanity and very especially, at this time, to us Franciscans who represent the Church in the Holy Land, asking something of us. This is obvious to me from the very fact that this “message” is sent all the way from America, very *precisely* to Jerusalem and to us Franciscans; for it could have had better diffusion from other places and with other instruments. I see in this the fulfillment of Scripture, which says: “*For from Jerusalem will the word of the Lord go forth*” (cf. Is 2:3).

As for my personal responsibility before God, I feel truly committed in accordance with these signs, because, it has been here, precisely in the Holy Land and in these events, where God has shown Himself to me, to my conscience, in a *concrete* form in relation to my priestly vocation.

And so, Father – and I come to the purpose of this letter – my petition is that Your Paternity may permit me to devote myself, in the form in which God may proceed to ask me, to announcing to the world this “message” in the form in which the Lord may gradually make it known to me, “message” which is not different from the Gospel but is, rather, a new

and urgent call to live it, which confirms my Franciscan vocation. This new call must be announced to the world from Jerusalem, “*starting from Jerusalem*” (Lk 24:47). This is what I have seen in all of this. While we see how the Lord gradually arranges things, my concrete petition is that I may be permitted for a time – while continuing to be linked to the Custody in which I have felt my vocation – to freely devote myself to announcing this “message” to the world, being granted the freedom of movement that may be necessary to announce it and to orient toward the Holy Land the persons in whom the announcement might arouse this desire.

The first image that comes to me, without yet knowing that it may be what God is concretely asking of me, is that I should not wait for people to come here in order to announce to them the “message” of the Word, but rather that I am to be able to go and announce it to them – to those to whom God may send me. Already there are people in whom God is arousing these desires.

The circumstance of my being linked to the Holy Land has special value and significance. Here is where I have come to know the Word in the form that the Lord has manifested it to me, and it is from here that the Lord wants me to announce it. What has happened here, which I have briefly attempted to make known, must be interpreted as a sign that God’s Will is that His “message” be made known to the world from here.

When I was about finished with the preparation of the aspect of this “message” that has come out in book form, being in Spain on the occasion of my 25 years of priesthood, and being faced with the deadline of March 31, 1971, that I was given for returning, I was seriously asking myself for a while which might be God’s Will: whether to return before the aforementioned date or to continue in what I was doing –

which I believed to be God's Will. When everything was most complicated, and an immediate solution to all I had in hand did not seem possible, everything began to straighten out so fast that I could only see in it God's Will that I return to Jerusalem, there to await the Lord's action. Immediately after, in the Chapter, came my separation from the pilgrims, something that left me quite bewildered for some time. But with the passing of the days, and meditating upon the circumstances in which I found myself, all of it has only confirmed me in what I have expressed.

Awaiting a reply from you, which I beseech you to kindly consider before the Lord, I wish you all the best and ask your blessing.

Friar José Barriuso

DOCUMENT 5

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

Terra Sancta Monastery

Jerusalem, Israel

Jerusalem, July 6, 1972

Rev. Fr. José Barriuso, O.F.M.

Bethlehem

Reverend and dear Father,

Your letter of June 16, 1972, has been examined by the Venerable Discretorium of the Holy Land, and I can assure you that it has been taken into great consideration and with concern, given the nature and contents of the "Message" known not only through your letter but also through the

manuscripts published and presented by you. The ways of the Lord, mysterious and inscrutable, are wide and luminous for those to whom He wishes to reveal them. Nevertheless, I must inform you that the Venerable Discretorium of the Holy Land is perplexed over the decision to be made regarding your petition –

“To be able to freely dispose of a period of time in order to devote yourself to announcing the ‘Message’ to the world, granting you the freedom of movement that will be necessary for announcing it, etc.”

– and thinks that it is not within its jurisdiction to grant what has been requested. At any rate, it advises you, if you think it appropriate, to present your project to the Curia General and, if it is the Lord’s Will, everything will work out in the best way.

Wishing you Peace and Good in the Lord, I bless you from my heart.

Friar Erminio Roncari, O.F.M.
Custos of the Holy Land

III

A BOOK: *THE "NEW EARTH"*

Documents 6-15

In May of 1972, Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti and Fr. Giuseppe (Giacinto) Napoli, through Father Barriuso, meet Señorita Josefina for the first time,

*The next two letters disclose some of the motives for their initial interest in the Message, sparked above all by the booklet *A los hombres de la “Nueva Tierra”* [To the men of the “New Earth”], the publication of which – carried out in June of the same year – was the fruit of this first encounter.*

The birth and development of these contacts are recounted in synthesis in the Letter to the Franciscans of the Holy Land, dated August 31, 1977 (cf. doc. 17, p. 138), and in the presentation letter of same, dated December 1, 1977 (cf. doc. 18, p.146}.

DOCUMENT 6

Bethlehem, August 6, 1972

Señorita Josefina,

As I promised, I have translated into the Italian language your last booklet: To the men of the “New Earth”. You will receive the typed copy before long through Fr. José Barriuso. On purpose, I have followed the draft of the manuscript even to the pagination, translating all the expressions concerning the “drawings”. In agreement with Father Giacinto, I have preferred to make an absolutely literal translation, permitting myself no liberty, and this in order not to modify your thinking in any way. It has turned out quite easy, given the clarity and conciseness of the original text. I believe that, notwithstanding the fact that maximum fidelity has been

observed, the translation has turned out clear and easy to understand.

Initially, talking with Father Giacinto, we had thought of doing an introduction and presentation of the booklet. But later, on further examining the contents and the three “Messages” placed at the beginning, we have thought it more fitting that the booklet be published as it has been written in order not to influence the reader in his interpretation and relative assimilative capacity. Personally, I think that no introduction can fulfill a better function than that fulfilled by the “Messages” placed at the front of the booklet.

This, however, does not mean that at a later date, if we find the time, both Father Giacinto and I may not decide to prepare a detailed commentary on the metaphysical-theological aspect of the booklet. From long discussions held together, it has turned out that the ideas presented in the text offer the possibility of an effective reevaluation of the ontological-metaphysical quest, the only thing that, in our opinion, can save human learning. The modern theological crisis has been prepared by the absolute exaltation of technical-scientific learning. The reconquest of God, founded on the existential plane of faith, must be prepared also by a new confidence in the quest of metaphysical learning. Unless one wants to get lost in the nets of the physical, the natural, the temporal, Metaphysics is the science that one cannot do without. And this seems to me to be the most important and significant aspect of the “Message” To the men of the “New Earth”.

May the Life of Christ continue to penetrate ever more deeply in the life of all those who approach you, Señorita Josefina. Greetings.

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti

DOCUMENT 7

September 12, 1972

Rev. Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti
Bethlehem – Israel

Very esteemed Father Raffaele,

It has been a great pleasure to receive your letter and also your translation sent by Father Barriuso.

Despite my little knowledge of the language, I have been able to read the translation with all clarity, and I realize that it expresses faithfully what is written in the original.

It seems to me that it is very important that you as well as Father Giacinto write some commentary that may clarify some points on its metaphysical-theological aspect, as you tell me, since many persons ask me questions that I answer according to the light the Lord gives me, and they are left satisfied; but for writing them, I do not have the scientific knowledge that some people who dedicate themselves to these studies need. I am preparing a few Notes that may clarify some points according to the questions they ask me. I have also made the drawings again and have had slides made in the Italian and English languages, for someone here has already done the English translation.

I am thinking of sending all this to Father Barriuso as soon as I have finished it so that the booklets may be made there in Jerusalem. Sometimes it seems to me that the Lord may send me there again, and so we will be able to talk further about all

this.

I am sure that the Lord will reward you as well as Father Giacinto with His grace for all you do so that this “Message” may spread and reach the men of the “New Earth” as soon as possible. Humanity is “hungry” for the pure Truth without fetters and deformations, for it alone will take us to the “TRUTH” itself, which will make us free.

Please give my regards to Father Giacinto and Brother Gabriele.

With my best wishes in Christ, greetings,

the slave of the Lord

Personal Reflections

“... the text offers the possibility of an effective reevaluation of the ontological-metaphysical quest... “(p.94).

In the man of today the reformulating of the question of the Being, with all that it implies, is the only thing that can save the species. Starting with the 18th century, and especially after Kant, metaphysics fell into complete disrepute, and for more than good reason. Before Kant it was believed that human reason possessed the qualifications for speaking about the transcendent, and metaphysics consisted precisely in this: to consider it as legitimate to speak of the ultimate realities from the standpoint of mere human understanding. But that's not so; this metaphysics is an imposture. The fact that we consider traditional metaphysics to be an imposture does not mean that a fully genuine metaphysical knowledge is impossible. This new metaphysics is what is being proposed in the Message.

“Humanity is ‘hungry’ for the pure Truth” (p.95).

In the deepest recesses of the human entity there is an infinite thirst that points to the Absolute, points to the Eternal, to God. This “hunger” cannot be silenced by any substitute; no entity, whatever it be, can satisfy us completely. Only the Being fills and satiates us.

For it alone [the pure Truth] will take us to the ‘TRUTH’ Itself, which will make us free” (p-95).

Real and full liberty in man will only be attained when the

Being Himself comes to liberate us. Liberty is only possible if we surrender our free will – our power to decide – to the Being. From the moment in which we no longer decide for ourselves, when we have renounced and placed in the Being our power to decide, from then on what we know as the human in us no longer operates, but rather an energy irrupts, filling us with a force, a courage, an unusual boldness. That is, our having lost our will means, in this case, that the Will unveils itself and goes into action; this is equivalent to saying that we lose our own will and gain the Will of the Being.

When I live the fact that my human faculties cannot offer me the Truth, and then I remain in a passive attitude, in humble recollection, in that moment there irrupts in the human being a lucidity, a sense of a Presence that is beyond what any knowledge could offer me. That is to say, the silence of the cognitive faculties in the human being is the minimum, indispensable prior step so that the Being might be able to disclose Himself in us.

When the human entity dispenses with all his affections, all his attachments, and above all, his attachment to himself – when we have already abandoned the search for our happiness, for our bliss in what entities could give or offer us – there, in that emptiness of heart, Love reveals itself. Dispensing with affections does not mean, however, that man becomes insensitive and indifferent, but just the opposite. When love invades us, a communication with all human beings – never before experienced – awakens in us.

The letter that follows is the first presentation of the Message to the Discretorium made jointly after four years of contact with the person who transmits it. It was written after a long, enlightening conversation held by the signatories with the Custos, Fr. Maurilio Sacchi.

The letter manifests their first reactions to this mysterious as well as unexpected encounter with a reality of a superior order. What had chiefly struck them, besides its doctrinal content, was the insistence on the affirmation that the Message was proposed first of all to the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land, their having a special responsibility for it. Not knowing exactly what this role of the Custody should consist in, the three religious thought it was sufficient what is concretely requested in the letter.

Only later, and very slowly, have they begun to understand the true significance, in the purely spiritual and existential realm, of the call received.

DOCUMENT 8

[Bethlehem], May 1, 1976

Most Rev. Fr. Maurilio Sacchi
Custos of the Holy Land
Very Rev. Fr. Discrets of the Holy Land

Very Reverend Fathers,

For some years now, we have been in contact with a person by the name of Josefina Chacín, who states that she has special mystical experiences that she has come to express in various writings, the publication of which Fr. José Barriuso took charge.

As a result of a long series of encounters during the space of several months, a new book entitled *The New Earth* has come to light. The book means to be the presentation and explanation of the author's mystical experience and of a divine Message to be communicated, by express command of God, to all humanity, starting out from the Holy Land.

This person is perfectly aware of the weight of such an affirmation and of the repulsion it can stir up in many readers, even the well-disposed. Given its intrinsic value, the book could have been presented as a personal conquest, which would have been much more acceptable; nevertheless, she has felt it her duty to confirm the fact that the book is fruit of a divine communication, even at the cost of seeing it discredited. This total fidelity to the voice of conscience on the part of a normal person uncommonly endowed cannot fail to pose a problem, and demands maximum respect....

We believe that the book represents, among other things, a

brilliant and original conquest of a philosophical nature that answers the most profound questionings of contemporary consciousness.

We have the impression that many intuitions more or less fragmentary, which we are familiar with in the most qualified thinkers, here find their synthesis based on a unitary intuition that illumines the whole.

It is a metaphysical-theological fathoming that recaptures and presents anew the content of our faith in the light of a unitary vision of all reality.

The interest aroused in us by her thought has grown little by little as we have been able to verify the perfect coherence of her life with what she affirms...

Father José Barriuso
Father Raffaele Angelisanti
Father Giacinto [Giuseppe] Napoli

Before presenting to the Discretorium the request for publishing the manuscript, the Custos, Father Sacchi, requests the advice of the renowned theologian Fr. Vittorino Joannes, O.F.M., of the lombardian religious province. Father Joannes, after meeting with Fathers Angelisanti and Napoli – Father Barriuso having left for Mexico a few days before – immediately understands the true sense of the problem as he expresses in his letter to the Custos, here reproduced, a copy of which he kindly left with us.

DOCUMENT 9

Jerusalem, May 15, 1976

Most Rev. and dear Father Custos,

I am sorry to leave without seeing you! But I always hope that the short distance between Italy and the Holy Land will grow ever shorter. A brief meeting, however, would have been helpful since, in the meantime, I have spoken at considerable length in Bethlehem with Fathers Raffaele and Giacinto. It has been a very useful and enlightening meeting for me also, and I believe that it has spelled out in a clearer way the real possibilities of action about the problem of which you had spoken to me. As to what can be done in these cases that do require great prudence but at the same time “intuitiveness”, which necessarily cannot but go beyond prudence and, above all, beyond any political “maneuvering”,

I am convinced of two fundamental points:

1. The person and the work in question are beyond all suspicion of pettiness, of personal interests, of heterodoxy that could cause concern. However, it is a matter of a spiritual “experience” more than a question of theological orthodoxy; the behavior, the expressions, the language of this person strongly remind me of similar experiences in the history of Christian spirituality (I could easily mention names and episodes). It is an experience and a message that enters the “furrow” of the most genuine Christian tradition; it is, therefore, a matter of “charisms” that, as such, are to be approached and perceived beyond the normal measuring criteria of a censorial nature. On the other hand, to accept the message proper to a spiritual “charism” never means to make of it an object of dogmatic adherence, provided that (as in this case) it opposes neither the contents of divine Revelation nor the authority of the Church; and in this case adherence and fidelity to the Church and love for it seem to me to be very marked. It may even be said that this spiritual theology, in the measure in which it is a “reviving” – with its own accentuations and colorations – of the fundamental message of the Gospel, has at least a right of asylum alongside so many other theologies and spiritual experiences.

2. There remains at this point the problem of submitting to a decision-making group (in this case the Discretorium) the possibility of publishing the work. After having analyzed such a prospect with Fathers Raffaele and Giacinto, it truly seems incongruent to make this work go through prior approvals and guarantees of a juridical and theological order. If at all, these could come after publication; and the reasons are many in favor of this procedure. Now then, you already have in your hands the letter of the two Fathers addressed to you and the Discretorium. The really simplest and most direct thing would

be to present the matter to the Discretorium just as it is; Father Raffaele could then underline some points and clarify personally any difficulties that might arise. The writer continually declares that in such a matter she entrusts herself totally to the divine will – whatever the result of such a step might be – and, therefore, she herself does nothing but indicate to you this route which certainly, from the standpoint of human “policy”, is the least safe, but it could also reveal itself as the most appropriate.

It seems to me, as you had already stated and as I am fully convinced, that in such a step, the fact that should be strongly underlined is the ticklishness and the “historic” responsibility of a refusal and a total closing-off to experiences that are multiplying in the Holy Land lately, and that should induce one to reflect on the duty and responsibilities of the Custody precisely in this moment, so difficult yet so alive for the history of the Church. I submit all this to you because you have questioned me about it, and the matter interests me very much. I think, however, that it is necessary to act with a great sense of surrender to the Divine Providence and without excessive fears. Unfortunately, I have had to write all this much too quickly, but I hope we may hear from each other soon. I remember you often, and I intend to continue to work for the Custody with all my affection and dedication. ‘Til another moment.

Friar Vittorino Joannes

Personal Reflections

“The person and the work in question are beyond all suspicion of pettiness, of personal interests.. . “ (p.102).

It is not with the intention of exalting the person who receives the Message, *the slave of the Lord*, but this person is one and the same with the Message. Hence, it is highly important to single out the living example that this person is in relation to the Message. Thus, for example, the doctrine contained in the Gospels cannot be separated from the intimate, private, and concrete life of Jesus. Similarly the doctrine of Gautama is exemplified in the most concrete events of his historical life. We insist that it is not a question of praising for the sake of praising, but rather it is indispensable for the very validation of this Message that the person who receives it be a living example of it. We are to put aside every urge of false modesty, since what is at stake is beyond all the conveniences of the world. On the other hand, adoration of the person who receives the Message is not being advocated but simply seeing in this person an example of what any human being could be who, having had such an experience of the Being, would have made this total, unconditional, and direct surrender to the Will.

The trust that may be awakened in us by the person who receives the Message as well as by the Message itself has to be total. There can be no doubt about the authenticity and truthfulness of what we are being told there. This trust does not come from reasons of a subjective nature; it is not a

question of becoming a follower only on the basis of the charisms possessed by the person who has the Experience, but also because in the one in whom this trust is awakened, an echo has sounded, a resonance of that same Reality. “... *it is a matter of a spiritual ‘experience’...*” (p. 102).

In order to talk about the experience that gave rise to the Message, perhaps the most adequate and appropriate way of expressing it would be to call it an “experience of the Being”; the expression “spiritual experience” lends itself to ambiguities since it would embrace everything from spiritism up to the real experience of the Being.

“The writer continually declares that in such a matter she entrusts herself totally to the divine will – whatever the result of such a step might be...” (p. 103).

What is to be understood by trusting totally in the divine will? In this very Message the distinction is made between “Will of Permission” and “Will of God”. Will of permission means that the human entity takes himself to be the arbiter of his life; he considers himself lord and master of his life. To be precise, this is what has happened, concretely, in the twenty-five centuries of the history of Western culture. The man of this culture did not realize that he was appropriating the energy of the Being for his own ends. It is worthwhile remembering that when man lives his life in this way, he is under the angelic power; free will in man is the most eloquent and astute way by which the angel rules the life of the human entity. In contrast, living in the Will of God is renouncing, at each moment of our lives, our own will; and it is also the most eloquent way of escaping from the power of the angels.

The problem is discussed in the Discretorium on May 28, 1976, and receives a positive solution, about which, however, a written communication is lacking in spite of the fact that the request had been presented by three religious¹.

Rather than to carelessness, this lack is probably due to the fact that one of the three signers, Father Angelisanti, was then a member of the Discretorium which was satisfied to transmit orally or with a written communication addressed to him alone the decisions taken, as will occur on some other occasions later on. This gap is filled by the report on the two discretorial sessions that was made by Father Angelisanti himself for Señorita Josefina's information in the letter that we reproduce herewith, followed by her answer.

From this report emerge the important decisions made:

1 – the publication of the book is authorized, with a precondition;

2 – it is decided that it be published as edited by the Custody of the Holy Land;

3 – it is decided that the Custody make a partial contribution for publication costs.

The third point will never be put into practice, the commitment assumed notwithstanding.

Señorita Josefina, having acknowledged the attitude of the Discretorium as “very positive and open to the faith,” accepts the condition set by it.

DOCUMENT 10

Bethlehem, May 30, 1976

Dear Josefina,

Two days ago, May 28th, during two discretorial sessions held morning and afternoon, the Discretorium of the Holy Land, under the Presidency of the Father Custos, took into consideration the letter that sometime ago Fathers Giacinto, José, and I had sent concerning the printing of your book, "*The New Earth*".

The matter was very seriously examined for more than two hours altogether. The initial presentation made by the Custos was positive and very open to spiritual experiences of this kind. The ensuing interventions by the individual Discrets were, despite my presence, sincere, self-committing, and quite varied and contrasting. No stand taken was substantially contrary to the request. The questions for clarification were multiple and were concerned with your person, your activity, your life, the books already published, the acceptance they have had by the reading public. Precise and detailed questions about the book under consideration have given me the opportunity to briefly explain how and where "it was born, the long work of elaboration, and its contents. I have, moreover, thought it opportune to highlight the importance you give to the fact that the book has been written in Bethlehem and that it be made known with some participation by the Custody of the Holy Land, land where for centuries the sons

of him [Francis] – who has rediscovered and again presented to the world the genuine Gospel message – have been working.

Because of the way the discussion went, having been offered some proposals with regard to the formalities to be followed in order to allow the printing of the book under the responsibility of the Custody, not knowing what to answer and fearing to go beyond my personal views of the moment, I requested that I be given the possibility to consult with Giovanni and Father Giacinto. After two hours of discussion with these two, despite my personal objections, we resolved to remain faithful to what had been previously decided: we do not think it appropriate that the book be read and examined by others, the confidence that the three signatories of the letter might inspire in the Discretorium sufficing.

In the afternoon session, the discussion moved along a much more theoretical level and removed from any interest of a financial nature. During this session, I believed it my duty to stress, although in a personal situation of strong inner uneasiness, the seriousness of the negative consequences that might befall the Custody in the case of a complete closing-off to the Message on its part or, worse still, of an explicit refusal. At this point, an accepting attitude toward the Message with an effective participation in its diffusion predominated.

To a specific question of mine as to whether the Custody believed its participation sufficient by the fact that it was allowing three of its religious to concern themselves with the printing and spreading of the Message, I was told that such authorization, even though positive, was considered too small and almost insignificant. The Custody, through the Discretorium, deems it opportune, even necessary, that it have

a greater participation in the responsibility for publishing the Message, presenting the book as edited by the Custody of the Holy Land itself. In order to do this, however, it believes it expedient that the following two conditions be agreed to:

1st – Have the book read and examined by Fr. Vittorino Joannes, Franciscan of Milan, co-responsible for the spiritual publications of the Custody, and obtain from him a written statement to this effect, and this in order to conform, at least in part, to the usual practice followed by the Discretorium of the Holy Land in similar circumstances.

It should be kept in mind that the authorizing of such a reading does not imply censorship, the Discretorium having repeatedly stated that it has the utmost confidence in the persons who in some way have collaborated in the preparation of the book.

2nd – Given the present economic-financial situation of the Custody, engaged in many and burdensome works of a social nature, the Custody would participate with a contribution for the printing of the book, letting others as well contribute to the diffusion of the word of God.

Lastly, the Custos asked me if I thought you might be opposed to the first condition, that is, allowing the reading of the book by Father Vittorino. The question that was posed to me presented quite grave aspects that immediately surfaced in my conscience. Whatever answer I might give seemed very dangerous to me. From a simple instrument in the hands of the Lord, I could have become a cause for deviating and hindering His work. For this reason, I requested that I might have the opportunity to consult with you before giving an affirmative or negative answer.

Here you have in synthesis and stripped of needless details

the content of the discretorial meeting.

With serenity, I await an answer from you with regard to what the Discretorium has asked of me. I am leaving on vacation next June 3rd. I entreat you to send a telegram at the following address: Delegation of the Holy Land, Via Matteo Boiardo 16, Rome, Italy, so that when I meet with Father Vittorino I may know what to do. To avoid any possible misunderstanding, the text of the telegram should read as follows: in an affirmative case, "Nothing against"; in a negative case, "Better not proceed".

Looking forward to meeting you again, I greet you affectionately and pray that you extend my greetings to all the family there.

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

DOCUMENT 11

Carrizal, Venezuela, June 8, 1976

Rev. Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti
Bethlehem, Israel

Dear Father Raffaele,

I have received your letter of last May 30th in which you inform me of the proposal of the Discretorium of the Custody of the Holy Land relative to the publication of the book "The New Earth". That is:

1st – To have the book read and examined by Fr. Vittorino Joannes, a Franciscan, and to obtain from him a written

statement to this effect, keeping in mind that the authorizing of such a reading does not imply censorship for the book, the Discretorium having declared its utmost confidence in the persons who in some way have collaborated in said book.

2nd – That the book would be presented as edited by the Custody of the Holy Land, the Custody participating with a financial contribution to the cost of the publication, leaving to others the freedom to contribute to the financing as well as to the diffusing of the Message.

Having consulted the Lord, I have seen nothing against the above-mentioned proposal of the Discretorium, which fact I have made known to you by telegram sent yesterday.

Personally, the attitude of the Discretorium seems to me to be very positive and open to the faith. Blessed be the Lord! The fact of their wanting another person to read and examine the book before its publication to me means one more guarantee and a much appreciated help in my difficult position as simple instrument of the Lord, ever fallible in whatever error of expression.

Once again, my part is only to be grateful to the Lord for the fact that He Himself continues to designate the instruments and to open the way by which His Message must reach the men of the “New Earth”. Whatever the result, it will be Will of God for me; to this Will, I cling unconditionally.

All the family in the Spirit who are here return your greetings. In union with Father Giacinto and Giovanni, do receive an affectionate embrace.

the slave of the Lord

Personal Reflections

“I have, moreover, thought it opportune to highlight the importance you give to the fact that the book has been written in Bethlehem and that it be made known with some participation by the Custody of the Holy Land” p. 107).

It is important to point out the extremely close relationship between the Message and the Gospel. The Message expresses itself by using, in good measure, the language of the Bible. But the similarity is more than a question of vocabulary: it is rather an identification with the postulate of Jesus Christ concerning *the denial of self*. *“Not my will but Thy Will be done”*.

The Message also has a special connection with the Franciscans, and more concretely with the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land. It is well to point out the importance of the coming of Francis, committed as he was to living the pure Gospel, what he called *Lady Poverty*, and at the same time how that vocation of Francis was devitalized through the institutionalization of the call he received. It can be said that the Message of Francis – which was nothing other than fully assuming the Gospel – came to be dead letter as a result of *rules*, codifications, and theologians.

It is very important to bring out the fact that the Message does not have as its exclusive addressees the followers of Jesus Christ. In the Message the Being speaks not only to Christians but to all the inhabitants of the planet, no matter

what religion or philosophy they profess. This Message could likewise be expressed in the language of Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, etc. The hour has arrived for the unification of the great mysticism. Now it will be easy for us to discover the common element in the teachings of a Buddha, of a Lao Tzu, of a Jesus Christ, of a Parmenides.

“The Custody, through the Discretorium, deems it opportune, even necessary, that it have a greater participation in the responsibility for publishing the Message, presenting the book as edited by the Custody of the Holy Land itself (p.108).

Initially the Custody was quite receptive to the Message, for they considered it necessary to have a greater participation in the responsibility for publishing the Message, presenting the book as edited by the Custody of the Holy Land.

“Having consulted the Lord.. . “ (p.110).

Is it really possible for man to communicate directly with the Being? As we have already said, this kind of question has no answer at the level of mere human understanding. But this in no way invalidates the question. Is a direct communication with the Being possible? Only the person who has had the experience can have full consciousness of this. Another question: How can a person who has not had such a direct communication with the Being have confidence that this particular person does actually communicate with Him? On the one hand, the way this person lives, the degree to which the presence of the Being shines through this person. On the other hand, the person who, without having this direct experience, shares it, does so by virtue of the inner resonance of the Word communicated to him. Faith, then, would be the simultaneous encounter, in the Being, between the person who communicates directly with the Being and the one who

believes in this person. “*And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit*” (Lk 1:41).

“... *simple instrument of the Lord*” (p.110).

The *instrument* serves as vehicle between the Being and the creatures. In this communication, what is truly important is the manifestation of the Being; in principle, the instrument counts for nothing; this means that the instrument is to live and experience his life as nothing. Despite the fact that the vehicle is nothing, nevertheless, for the purposes of the “message”, the instrument is of immeasurable importance. The significance and transcendency of the instrument is proportionally related to how he assumes his nothingness: the more nothingness, the more interpenetration and unity with the Being. It is only in those instruments in whom their nothingness becomes almost total nothingness where the Being expresses His “message” most completely. In the history of humanity, the beacons that have enlightened the species have been a few nothingness-men. The authentic Masters of the species are these nothingness-men. The nothingness is the thermometer for gauging the authenticity of man.

“... *that He Himself continues to designate the instruments and to open the way by which His Message must reach the men of the ‘New Earth’*”(p.110).

The *instrument* is only a bridge through which the Being Himself is going to bring His Work to fulfillment. The vehicle is to adopt a completely passive attitude; at no time will he be able to consider himself the protagonist of the Work. Hence, the Being Himself must be the one to continue designating the other instruments and the Being Himself must

open the way. The other instruments can function effectively only in the light that shines in the vehicle with whom contact is made: this is the great unity. To be more exact, we can affirm, by means of language, the distinction between the vehicle and the other instruments; it could be said, then, that the vehicle is the Instrument and the rest are only instruments. This difference, however, does not imply a valuation, a hierarchy, for at the end of the Work, the vehicle as well as the other instruments will be on the same level.

The “New Earth” is for the man of today the real possibility that the Being be his *abode*. The Being, at this late stage in history, is speaking to the human entity in terms and in a manner that are totally unusual: it is as if the *hour* had arrived in which we humans are being offered the opportunity of living our lives directly from our definitive and absolute essence. The “New Earth” is the culminating hour of the species: it is the Being Himself who will take the reins of human destiny. The “New Earth” does not consist simply in a lived-experience of the Being on an individual level but, above all, on a collective level. The “New Earth” is a collective undertaking that can be lived today by the species under the direct guidance of the Being.

“Whatever the result, it will be Will of God for me; to this Will, I cling unconditionally” (p.110).

“Whatever the result”: Does this mean that all that happens occurs by Will of God? Does everything come about by God’s design? There is nothing, not a single phenomenon, that is not sustained by the Being; everything ultimately is grounded in the Being. Does this mean that the Being is the cause of the deviation, of the ignorance, and of the unconsciousness in which man has lived?

One of the most enlightening contributions we find in the Message is, as we have said, the distinction between Will of Permission and Will of God. Will of God, or Will of the Being, or simply Will expresses the permanent and constant dynamism of the Being; there is no phenomenon, event, or happening, be it in the visible or in the invisible world, that does not ultimately depend on the Being. Every manifestation comes from the Being. Now then, not only does all that exists come from the Being, but it is to return to Him.

How is this return to come about? It is clearly seen that the entities, while they are what they are, “behave” as if their being were in their very selves. Take, for example, a tree. Everything seems to indicate that the tree exhausts its being in being a tree. The whole process that takes place from the moment the seed is sown until its culmination in the growth, development, and flowering of the tree itself, all of this seems to indicate, as we have seen, that the tree consists simply in being what it is – this tree. The same is true of the human entity. When we observe ourselves in our behavior, it would seem as if all our actions and our whole life were a circle closed in itself; the wellspring or source from which issues forth what I am, is I myself. And nonetheless, it is enough to learn *to see* things. Immediately, in this new *seeing*, we discover that in the tree there is nothing that is of the tree itself; everything that is manifested in it and its very self come from the Being. So, too, in the human entity: the physical medium in which we live is not of man’s making; the fact that we think, feel, and decide is also a gift we receive; the fact that we are social beings, that we need the companionship and efforts of others, is a necessity, not an invention of man. So then, everything in man is a gift he receives.

When entities behave as if their being were in their very

selves, and not in the Being, this is called unconsciousness. Unconsciousness means that the entity considers himself as centered in himself, as lord and master of himself, unaware of his real truth, which consists in the fact that the Being is the only truth of every entity.

As is seen, there is a maladjustment or disharmony in the unconscious entities. Hence, it is imperative that harmony reign, that things return to the place from which they came; or also, which is equivalent, that all entities proclaim that the Being is their true Being. It is here that an extraordinary role is played by what the Message calls “free beings”. Today these free beings are represented in man. In the Message it is said that, before the liberty came to be in man, the angels were the bearers of this liberty. What is the significance of the fact that there are some free beings? This means that these free beings are the ones who are to proclaim the preeminence of the Being and make it prevail. By “free being” is meant that this being is to fully assume the true essence of entity: that at the same time that he is the entity that he is, he is nothing, since the only one who *is* is the Being. So then, the free beings are those “in charge”, those responsible for making harmony and justice reign.

In the Message we are told that at first the angels – the so-called gods – were those in charge of making this justice reign. But a moment arrived when time ran out on the angels because they had used up their power of election; some of them – those who affirmed their *personality* in the Being – coming to consciousness, and others – for having affirmed themselves in their doing – remaining in the unconsciousness; the latter failed to fulfill their mission. And it was then that man was chosen in place of the angels. Until that moment, the angels – those whom we call gods – were above man. But

now these gods lost the opportunity to be the protagonists of the Work; this role, which formerly belonged to them, now belongs to man. In the Message it is clearly seen that man, from the moment he is invested with the status of free being, is superior, to the angels – to the gods. This fact of the disqualification of the gods was clearly seen in Greek history, precisely when philosophy appeared. In the history of the Greek people, philosophy marks the dividing line: before it, the gods; after it, man himself.

Let's go back to where we left off: what is the *immediate* cause of everything that takes place in the universe? We now have at hand the elements for offering an adequate answer to the question. Ultimately the Being is the absolute ground, but *in the meantime* there are some free beings who are responsible for making justice reign. That is to say, there is someone responsible for what happens – the free creature. As we have said, before man, the gods had this responsibility; but they deified themselves, they became filled with pride in their “doing”, in their “godness”; they remained in themselves, and in the end, they became oblivious of the Being. The same thing is about to happen in man. The humanism inaugurated by the Greeks led man to believe himself to be self-sufficient. But this history of the West is a superbly illustrative example, since from this very history it has been clearly seen that humanism leads nowhere, that it does not offer us the Truth. This humanism cries out from the depths of itself, clamoring to be transcended. The failure of humanism is the most clamorous petition that Justice reign, that the preeminence of the Being be established.

Will of God means that the free creature, conscious of his liberty and his nothingness, that is, conscious of his responsibility, places his life in the hands of the Father; it means that

his life is an example of what the entity, the creature, is. When an entity, in this case man, carries out this surrender to the Being, the activity of the Divine manifests itself in him; in this event, *Realization* is attained. When a man becomes *realized*, through him all of creation is consecrated, is rescued. It is in this sense that the statement that Christ is Savior acquires its full force.

Will of Permission means two things: in the first place, it means that the free entity *unconsciously* identifies himself with himself in his “doing”. In this unconscious behavior, he misuses the energy of the Being, appropriating it for himself. In the second place, the appropriation of this energy of the Being, in “doing”, can also be done in a conscious way, that is to say, the free creature, though aware of his nothingness, persists in living identified with himself; this is what has been called the satanic.

The responsibility of man is enormous; the Work hinges on us; on us, on our self-realization depends the destiny of all creation, of all that exists. In the Message, this prodigious role to which man has been destined is persistently stressed. But we are likewise warned: just as the angels’ time expired, their end of time arrived, so also will it happen in man; to be precise, this Message is the clarion call that sounds at the end of time. According to what we have said in *part one*, “The Awakening of Consciousness in the Man of Today”, with reference to the humanism of Western culture: the hour has arrived for man to disidentify himself with the human and to surrender himself to the Being.

*After receiving from Señorita Josefina a first bank check for publication costs of the book **The “New Earth”**, Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti receives a second check.*

The two checks are then deposited in the Office of the Procurator General of the Holy Land.

DOCUMENT 12

Carrizal, June 16, 1976

Dear Father Raffaele,

For some time now, some people have been asking me if they can collaborate in the publication of the book “The New Earth”, and I had not accepted their collaboration because I saw in the Lord that I was to wait for the answer from the Franciscans of the Holy Land. After your last letter in which you inform me of the decision of the Discretorium of the Holy Land to publish the book, leaving to others the freedom to contribute to the financing as well as to the diffusing of the Message, I have felt free to accept said collaboration; and today I have been handed the sum that I am sending you by First National City Bank check, No. 152153, in the amount of US\$23,255.81, for you to add to the amount of US\$5,000 delivered in Bethlehem on the part of Señorita Margot de Stolk. I will continue these remittances to you as other persons who desire to collaborate present their contribution.

I send you a warm embrace, wishing you every good in the Lord,

the slave of the Lord

NOTE: The checks have been made out by these persons in your name and/or Father Barriuso's. Let me know if they should make them out in your name only or in the name of the Custody of the Holy Land.

DOCUMENT 13

Office of the Procurator General
Terra Sancta
Jerusalem

No. 575

Jerusalem.. .10 August 1976.....\$23,255.81
Received from Rev. Frs. R. Angelisanti and J. Barriuso.....
the sum of.....U.S.A. Dollars 23,255.81.....
for their deposit (Publication of the book "New Earth")

Fr. Basilio del Rio
Procurator General

Personal Reflections

“...I saw in the Lord that I was to wait for the answer from the Franciscans of the Holy Land” (p.118).

The Message was to be addressed, first of all, to Christians so that they could rescue the pure Gospel; hence the Message ought to be offered to Christianity through the Franciscans, for the Message of Francis was in his time animated by the same spirit of living the pure Gospel. Just as Francis was entrusted in his time: *“Repair my Church which threatens to crumble”*, so also the Message represents the same for Christianity today.

A Case of Conscience shows us how the Message has effectively shaken the foundations of Christianity in the sense that three of its representatives have fully assumed the existential risk of living the pure Gospel, a risk that can only be assumed if the ties with every possible institutionalization of the Truth are broken, and if one fully clings to the word of Jesus Christ: *“...the son of man has nowhere to lay his head”*, which is equivalent to saying, the son of man cannot do anything on his own.

In what is essential, the Message has already fulfilled its mission in Christianity. From now on the Message is to launch a rescue mission. To all other cultures and civilizations, to any nation or culture where the most minimum vestige of the Truth has been left, there the Message will have to go to rescue it so that in this way all peoples may unite around the one Truth: the preeminence of the Being.

The precondition requested by the Discretorium for the publication of the book was met by Father Joannes' positive judgment, which we take the liberty to reproduce here both because at that time he himself left us a copy and because it already forms part of the documentation presented to the Father Visitor (cf doc. 52, p. 261).

DOCUMENT 14

READING NOTES

TAKEN ON THE WORK "*THE NEW EARTH*"

1. I am deliberately giving these pages the modest title of "reading notes" because they are not intended to be, in any way whatsoever, a "theological rating" or an "imprimatur".

2. Nevertheless, I have always presupposed a principle that I take for granted and as self-evident: in the reading of the work (taken as a whole as well as considered in its single points or passages), I have always kept in mind the exigencies for correctness in *de fide* dogmatic expressions, that is, in the faith professed by the Catholic Church, yet avoiding confusing the essence of the dogmatic formulation with theological interpretations, be they classical and universally accepted (for example, Thomism), or modern, and which have an equally acknowledged right to citizenship in the theological discourse. I maintain that this distinction (today recognized within a healthy theological pluralism) is essential in order

not to fall into predetermined attitudes of rejection or into analyses, sterile by themselves, because they would only mean the comparing of a theological interpretation with another preceding it in a historical sense, but not necessarily having a qualitative or authoritative priority.

3. I guarantee that I have carefully examined, attentively read, each page of the work, re-reading passages and making comparisons, pausing in a special way on those particularly new and original views and themes where it would be easier to raise objections or become opposed. This long and meditated reading has produced almost forty pages of notes, which I later did not think helpful to present as they were, but preferred to synthesize them in some points that could be fundamental to the purposes for which I have been asked to read the work.

4. I point out that the work must certainly be read with an all-encompassing theological perspective of a metaphysical-spiritual type and not with the perspective of an “historical-positive theology”. This type of reading is imperative, not for the sake of being intentionally benevolent in our judgment about the work but, rather, for professional honesty. The reading, for example, of the work of Teilhard de Chardin cannot be done with the eyes of the archeologist or of the ethnologist-anthropologist, even though elements are found in it that touch upon these sciences. The same is to be said of works such as those of John of the Cross, Angelus Silesius or, more recently, even those of Urs von Balthasar or Karl Rahner.

The *reading perspective* is an essential and professionally honest key for the sake of not deforming the intentions and expressions of the one who speaks or writes or in any way communicates a message.

Having pointed this out, I indicate by way of synthesis the essential points that to me seem necessary for an evaluation of the work:

1. *The literary genre*

It is a literary genre that is typical and already known in the theological tradition. It is not a matter of a proceeding by means of logical deductions, characteristic of theology manuals that limit themselves to systematizing ideas for didactical purposes but, rather, a matter of a “creative” proceeding which, departing from some fundamental ideas, gradually develops and amplifies these ideas in a continuous circular movement up to creating an overall vision, broad and characteristic, so that at the end of the work one finds oneself before a new vision interpretative of the “Christian fact”. The literary genre moves along on different planes which, nevertheless, continuously intersect each other: the plane of metaphysical reflection; the plane of logical deduction; that of the reinterpretation of the Biblical text; that of the religious-spiritual valence of the whole vision. The whole, however, does not give the impression of confusion but, rather, of a precise and compact design that little by little develops in spirals, ever broader and richer. At certain moments, if one’s attention slackens, one could have the impression of confusion. It is advisable in that case (on names and concepts) to refer to the vocabulary contained in Vol. 4: it is very revealing. Through it, it is possible to perceive a rich variety of meanings which do not contradict each other but, rather, attain an interesting unity in which the different planes become integrated and enriched.

2. *The contents*

The overall content of the work can be understood as a

broad “theology of the Being” which unfolds in innumerable nuances, very delicate but very rich as to philosophical, theological, spiritual implications. From the first moment, a strong intellectual and spiritual tension is felt that never lets up, not even for an instant, throughout the entire work; and this is truly impressive, because usually, in this kind of work, there always occurs an academic moment of tension-decline. Here, as a rule, the tension becomes recharged by sudden illuminations, words, definitions, new and different acceptations of terms, or else-by Biblical quotations that retrieve a frankly admirable emotion of a theological-poetic type. It is like a long musical “*ricercare*” which, nevertheless, never loses a background of tranquil assurance and even of modesty in proposing the ideas and new acceptations of terms which, although already used elsewhere, here ever acquire new value and nuances. This “novelty”, nevertheless, never becomes opposed (in my opinion, and I have reflected on it a good deal) to the doctrine dogmatically acquired; rather, it seems to me that it allows for further work of profundization that could lead to real, original formulations in the future as well. This means that the work is not closed in itself, is not a sterile episode, but can have a stimulating function for fecundating theological and spiritual thought that usually becomes acclimated and sedimented in old and even very new but self-satisfied academisms.

In a special way, the vision of the Trinity, of the Incarnation, of the Church, of the “History of Salvation”, of grace, of the Sacraments – understood as single chapters of the broad theological discourse – here acquire interesting, fecundating elements, unheard of until now, but not in contradiction with the universal “*sensus fidei*”. I underline in a most particular way the “ecumenical” sense of the entire discourse of the

work; “ecumenical”, not only because I find there many precious elements for a spiritual-theological encounter with traditions of the Eastern Churches and with the Reformation theology (I have in mind above all the meaning of grace and of the Church), but also because in its global vision, it assumes universal religious values and intuitions, from the first of the pre-Socratic philosophical-theological experiences to those of the great cosmic and historical non-Christian religions.

3. *The iconography*

The iconography, intimately linked to the written work, is a fundamental element of the work: It characterizes it and at the same time renders it sister to other great expressions of this literary genre. Consider, for example, how the thought of a John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Angelus Silesius is born, and even the sketches of Teilhard de Chardin, at first derided and today considered of inestimable value.

The phenomenon of an intuitive mind that becomes expressed above all in an iconic expression is today considered of enormous creative value. Strangely enough, this is due precisely to the acquisitions of the most correct psychoanalysis, or better still, to “depth psychology”. Today there are even university professorships that deal with this phenomenon and study it as a fact of fundamental importance. Now then, I have read the whole work with the guidance of each one of the drawings; I have then discussed them with a professor of religious psychology at the Catholic University of Milan, who was impressed by the linearity or coherence, by the accuracy, and by the ideal richness that unfolds little by little in this iconography. To my precise question as to whether in his diligent viewing of the drawings he detected any element of disturbance or psychological distortion (with the guidance of

the Rorschach plates), he has to the contrary stated that he perceives a clear-cut strength of visual and ideal conceptualization typical of pronounced minds and sensibilities. His astonishment increased when I told him that the author has had no specific higher learning, neither iconographical nor metaphysical nor religious. On this point I have wanted, out of professional honesty and duty, to ask for the help of a specialist on the subject. From a theological viewpoint, the iconography is foundational for the understanding of the work.

Final observation

I have analyzed in a special way the manner of using single words, of formulating the thought in sentences, the use of upper and lower case: I maintain that it is essential not to make any correction, since in a good many cases it is precisely this usage and this searching that eliminate eventual doubts and fears of a doctrinal type. From a practical point of view, I would suggest that (in the event that the work is published) great attention be placed on the graphic presentation. An improper presentation might be detrimental to the work, which could instead present itself – if not immediately, then later on – as a highly interesting voice of the inexhaustible possibility of religious thought and of the Christian mystery in particular,

Milan, 17 June 1976

Friar Vittorino Joannes, O.F.M.

Personal Reflections

“The overall content of the work can be understood as a broad ‘theology of the Being’” (p. 123).

The expression “theology of the Being” is, without a doubt, new. Theology, as its name indicates, has to do with God. The Being was the patrimony of Philosophy. When the possibility of a “theology” of the Being is suggested, it is as if one were proposing to break the framework of traditional theology. The old concept of God now turns out to be too narrow: it is as if theology had the need to go beyond God. Precisely what the Message does is to take God out of Theology and the Being out of Philosophy. God as the business of theologians as well as the Being as the business of philosophers have been nothing other than the covering-up of the Truth.

“The iconography, intimately linked to the written work, is a fundamental element of the work...” (p. 124).

The written work is the word, taken mainly as *meaning*. In this sense, discourse – oral as well as written – is the most eloquent expression of how meaning can aspire to represent the real. We know quite well how, during the twenty-five centuries of Western culture, meaning sought to acquire a hegemonic power. The philosophical systems, the theologies, the scientific theories are the most palpable examples of how meaning succeeded in convincing man that it was the place of reality. In the face of the meaning of the word, it is well to point up the symbol. Thus, for example, art is eminently

symbolic. In poetry, the meaning of the words is not of primary interest, but through the words, in this case the metaphor, a dimension opens up that goes beyond meaning. Religion is likewise eminently symbolic; thus, for example, in Christianity the symbol of the cross. Now then, it is good to be very clear about the fact that the Being escapes the meaning as well as the symbol. Just as a system of thought can seek to establish itself as the ultimate expression of the Truth, which is equivalent to falling into dogmatism, so also the symbol can get us to consider its representations as the expression of the Absolute, which would be another form of dogmatism.

The symbol is represented in the word by the sound and the written form of the letters. These components of the word, as we have said, were neglected in Western culture, with the exception of religion and art. Nevertheless, this Western religion and this Western art have been overly mediated by the dominance of meaning. Rescuing the importance of the symbol has represented one of the most singular events of this 20th century, not in order to elaborate a system based on the greater importance of the symbol, as it occurred in structuralism, but in Order to let the symbol speak to us, just that, no more; that is to say, to learn to approach the symbol without the mediation of meaning. The symbol is not for the purpose of explaining, it's not explanatory, but rather it is one of the most eloquent forms through which the Being can speak to man, with the immediate clarification that the symbol is not the language of the Being either.

Symbol means that the word, its meaning, is accompanied by something else. In the symbol, the thing as such a thing is present, but what is more important is this *something else* that accompanies the thing.

During his stay in Mexico, Father Barriuso receives, in answer to his letters in which he gave a report on his activity there, the following letter from the Custos, Father Sacchi, in which, among other things, the Custos informs him that the Discretorium has shown interest in the publication of the book The “New Earth”.

DOCUMENT 15

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

June 24, 1976

Dear Father Barriuso,

I am writing to you on my return from a long tour through our missions. When I returned home, I had the pleasure of finding your letters which I have read with much attention and pleasure. I am greatly pleased by all the good you are doing and can do during your providential stay in the land of Mexico. May the Lord help you and bring about through you fruits of goodness and kindness.

We here are discussing how to proceed on the publication of Señorita Josefina’s book. I believe that Father Raffaele has already brought you up to date as to how things stand. In effect, the Discretorium has shown an interest in the matter, even though it has not yet found the form or the mode for carrying out what has been proposed. With God’s help, we hope that something can be done. Regarding your request to

extend your stay in Mexico in order to carry out the printing of other volumes of the same kind, I'll tell you frankly that the matter is somewhat complicated, especially because of the fact that, on account of vacations, a good many friars are missing in Bethlehem, namely, the Father Guardian, Father Raffaele, Brother Gaetano, Brother Giuseppe, and Brother Mark who is substituting for the director of the Pilgrims' Office in Jerusalem. On the other hand, I don't think it opportune to submit your request to the Discretorium. Personally, I would think the following: I allow you to extend your stay in Mexico two or three weeks, and this I can do without the necessity of consulting others. Try to finish your work during this time.

While I renew my best wishes for you, I greet you fraternally.

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

IV

A SPROUT OF LIFE: THE MILK GROTTTO

Documents 16-21

The formation of the new Discretorium in the summer of 1977 and the imminence of the Capitular Congress with the formation of the new religious families explain the contents of the letter that follows.

In it the three religious again present their joint spiritual experience, no longer only as an enrichment of intellectual cognitive order, but above all an incipient concrete participation – even though only from the outside – in the Message translated into life by a group of people, for whom official authorization from the Discretorium is now requested so that they may continue to reside in the place where they are staying (with the authorization of the Father Guardian of Bethlehem, given with the foreknowledge of the Father Custos). At the same time, the three religious manifest for the first time their spiritual exigency to be placed in conditions enabling them to vitally deepen the experience begun.

DOCUMENT 16

Bethlehem, August 29, 1977

Most Rev. Fr. Custos
Fr. Maurilio Sacchi and
Very Rev. Fr. Discrets of the Holy Land

Most Rev. Fr. Custos, very Rev. Fr. Discrets,

On May 1, 1976, we communicated to the Discretorium of the Holy Land our request to be authorized to publish, in the name of the Custody, the book *The New Earth*, written by Señorita Josefina Chacín. Among the motivations adduced, there was one to which we attached great importance and a special significance. The writer had expressed to us her conviction that “*the Franciscans, and in particular those of the Holy Land, have a special role to play in relation to the Message*”⁴ contained in the book.

The request was discussed by the Discretorium on the following May 28th. The enclosed document will be able to enlighten you regarding the results of the discussions. Things now – following the authorization granted by the Discretorium – are at the point in which the printing of the book is about to be finished.

Perhaps it is fitting to make known some aspect of the spirituality of the “Message” contained in this book and in the others already published.

One of its fundamental points is the unconditional quest for God’s Will, placing our liberty at His complete disposal. The

acting of the liberty oriented to itself and to works creates the world of Permission in which God places Himself at the service of our unconsciousness in order to promote Man's evolution. The orientation of the liberty to God makes possible the creation of a world according to His Will. Our liberty is the condition that permits or impedes God's manifesting Himself and bringing to fulfillment His Work. The one thing that is asked of man is the total surrender of his own liberty, which implies the dying to himself, the greatest act of love of which we are capable. Only in this way does man become an instrument of God and ceases to be an obstacle: *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters"*. "Being" instead of "doing"; letting God act in us and with us, instead of "doing" on our own initiative and according to human calculations.

Here is the secret of the intimate life of Jesus Christ and therefore the Good News of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in us.

We believe that this is also the rediscovery of the Gospel by the Seraphic Father, the most genuine element of the Franciscan ideal.

In over five years of contact with the people committed to living the "Message", we have been able to verify with our own eyes that it is not just a matter of words or abstract principles, but rather of an experience lived to the fullest that bears witness of itself. It is a living reality, evangelical and Franciscan, that has become deeply engraved in our consciences and which we feel the need to make known to our confreres and to all who are thirsty for eternal life.

Perhaps there has been born, or has been given to us as a gift, that something which we all, more or less consciously,

have long desired and which in the last Custodial Chapter, when spiritual themes were being discussed, we sought with the anguished question so often repeated in the meeting hall: “What are we to do?” We are deeply convinced that spiritual realities are not “created” by human decisions and measures but are “born” and are received “as a gift”, as is everything that is life and divine life. The one thing that is being asked of us is that we take care of this sprout of life and help it to grow there where it is.

Before formulating our request, we present a very brief account of the sojourn of those persons in Bethlehem and precisely at the Milk Grotto:

From October, 1973, to January, 1974, with due permission from the Guardian, Fr. Justo Artaraz, and from the person responsible for the Grotto, Fr. Antonio Baro, with the prior knowledge of the Very Reverend Father Maurilio Sacchi, then Acting Custos;

From April, 1975 until today, with the consent of the Guardian, Fr. Giacinto Napoli, and of those responsible [for the Grotto], Frs. Modesto Reza and José Barriuso, with the prior knowledge of the same Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos at the time.

We assure you that during this time everything has unfolded in a completely normal way and with the greatest sense of human and religious responsibility.

Here is our request: in conscience we feel it our duty to ask that this group be officially granted permission to continue living at our Milk Grotto Shrine and at the same time that we, too, be given the possibility of going deeper, together with these people, into the experience initiated.

Assistance to pilgrims and service to the parish will

continue to be rendered as has been done until now.

Trusting in your understanding, we present our fraternal greetings.

Fr. José Barriuso
Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti
Fr. Giacinto Napoli

Owing to the foregoing request for official authorization in favor of the Milk Grotto Group¹, the Custos, Father Sacchi, met with Señorita Josefina and requested that she herself make the written request for this authorization.

Señorita Josefina, after having spent a day in prayer in order to understand what God's Will might be, even though she herself intended to simply follow the directions given her by the Father Custos, felt, to her surprise, interiorly compelled to write a letter, the contents of which went far beyond her intentions and, what is more, addressed not to the Father Custos or to the Discretorium but to all the friars of the Custody of the Holy Land, in the conviction that such was the Will of the Lord.

The letter was sent to all and each one of the religious of the Custody with the letter of presentation dated December 1, 1977 (cf. doc. 18, p. 146).

DOCUMENT 17

Bethlehem, Milk Grotto
August 31, 1977

To the Franciscans
of the Custody of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

Dearly beloved brothers in the Heart of Christ,

According to the request of the Father Custos, fulfilling the Will of the Lord at whose service I find myself since August 22, 1954, when by His grace I came to consciousness of the unconsciousness in which I was living, I am addressing all of you in order to tell you:

In this coming-to-consciousness, the Lord has made known to me at different moments the “Message” that through several writings I have tried to express:

That the hour is coming and is now! in which the *true* worshipers must worship God in spirit and in truth, submitting themselves unconditionally to His Divine Will, after the example of Jesus of Nazareth, because the moment of His Justice is coming.

That the time of mankind’s “evolution” in the knowledge of good and evil is coming to an end, and man must freely and consciously affirm his decision in the Being or in the “non-being”: in “being” or in “doing”; in God or in the creature; in Love or in Power: in God’s Will or in His Permission. And that, in order for man to know and come to consciousness of these realities, it is necessary that His “Message” be spread from this Holy Land, Scripture thus becoming fulfilled.

And it is to the Franciscans, custodians of the Holy Places, to whom this mission is first offered, mission which must be accepted or rejected freely and consciously by each one, for this is not a Message that can be preached by word alone; rather, along with the preaching of it goes the committing of one's life in order to be transformed by the force of the "living word" which the Message contains, bringing about in each one the coming-to-consciousness necessary for his personal decision. It is for the purpose of transmitting this knowledge, more with my life than with my words, that the Lord has repeatedly sent me to this Holy Land over the course of more than ten years, and during this time I have been in contact with some Franciscan Fathers who already know the "Message" in the form that the Lord has gradually presented it to them, and which is already beginning to be an experiential reality for them.

From December of 1966 to the present, the Lord has been sending me to the Holy Land, ever since He sent me from Madrid, Spain, to Cairo, Egypt; and from there – from the Cairo airport – I was sent on, because of the war, to Jerusalem.

On that occasion, I was lodging at the Casa Nova of Jerusalem. One day while visiting the Temple where the Mosque of Omar is located and while Fr. José Barriuso was explaining to another lady and to me all that is related to the Temple, according to the Scriptures, the Lord let me know that I was to show Father Barriuso the drawings I had made for expressing those things that He was making known to me, which things had been confirmed for me by the Sacred Scriptures. On our return from the Temple, at the Casa Nova I showed Father Barriuso the drawings as the Lord had let me know I should do. On the following day, when I had already

made up my mind to cross the border between Jordan and Israel in order to visit the holy places on that side, prior to departing for Venezuela, the Lord let me know during the Holy Mass that I should remain in Jerusalem and communicate to Father Barriuso, as long as he was disposed to listen, the knowledge that He had given me and which was expressed in the drawings. This is what I did.

I remained in Jerusalem until May 10, 1967. During that time, I was in constant communication with Father Barriuso. As long as he was interested in knowing the contents of the drawings, the Lord continued to explain to me the passages of the Scripture according to the Gospel, making of the two Testaments one reality, as it is found in the book "Pilgrimage of the People of God" presented by Father Barriuso, fruit of these "conversations" in the Lord.

On the first of May of the same year 1967, the Lord had let me know that on the 13th of that same month I was to be at the Shrine of Fatima in Portugal. I had finished writing the book and needed to finish only a few details of the drawings. After I had written the first part of the book, Father Barriuso told me to try to keep only to the Scriptures without adding explanations of my own. From that moment, the Lord gave me no more than the texts of the Old and New Testaments with hardly any explanation. Father Barriuso had also told me that the drawing that represents the history of the People of God in Time, in its entirety, and which terminates at the end of the cross with the star formed by two triangles, might not be published with this star because it could bring about problems with the authorities for its acceptance since we were in Arab territory and that star was an emblem of the Jews that appeared on their flag (Jerusalem then belonged to Jordan). After this, obeying the opinion of Father Barriuso, I cut out

the star on the drawing, leaving only the cross; but when I was about to pack the drawings together with the manuscript of the book in order to hand it over to Father Barriuso, the Lord told me that the drawing could not go without the star because it signifies “the return of the ‘People of God’ and their entry into the ‘Promised Land’.” I put the star back in its place, and when I handed the drawings and manuscripts to Father Barriuso, I told him what the Lord had let me know and that, above all, I must fulfill His Will. Father Barriuso asked me in surprise, “Does this mean that we will have war? Do you think that Israel will enter this side?” Now it was my turn to be surprised, for such a thing had not occurred to me, since I was unacquainted with the political situation existing in this place. The only thing that mattered to me was the spiritual reality and the meaning that the Lord had let me know, which were expressed in the drawings: the two triangles of the star signify the Beginning and the End, what some call “Alpha and Omega”; it also signifies the first and second coming of the Lord, according to the human way of speaking, and which is one reality: “Head” and “Body” of the Only Begotten; the star represents the manifestation of this unity. The two triangles also represent the Mercy and Justice of God. There would be so much yet to say about this symbol!

As to “People of God”, the Lord has made known to me that they are all the human beings, irrespective of race, nation, or religion who, having reached a higher state of evolution, attain in themselves the faith of Abraham, renouncing the different manifestations of their egoistic self, represented in the words that God said to Abraham: “Leave your country, and your kinsfolk, and your father’s house . . .” leaving in this way the simple natural life, impelled by human energy = will of creatures, toward a supernatural life, impelled by Divine

energy = Will of God, state that we have seen realized in Jesus Christ: “My food is to do the Will of my Father.. . “and then, “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt”. This is the “return”, not only the return of man to that state which the first man had in Paradise, before disobeying God and “subjecting himself to the creature, but also the continuation of that which was begun and which could not be realized in the first man for his not having obeyed God and not having affirmed his liberty in the Divine Will. By “Promised Land”, I understand the Divine reality that is found in man and towards which he must “journey as a pilgrim” each day, each instant of his life, denying himself: *“If any one wishes to come after me, let him deny himself.. .”*

On the 10th of May, I left for Lisbon, Portugal, from the Amman airport. After the 13th of May, the Lord sent me to Madrid, Spain, and while there, on the first days of the month of June, I learned that war in Israel had broken out, because some people in the house . where I was staying called me to come and look at the television. Great was my surprise when I entered the living room and on the television screen saw a flag with the two-triangled star, which was rising over Bethlehem. I would not be able to describe the joy that overwhelmed my heart in those moments, for the Lord was telling me that this was the “sign” that the time had come. The people who were watching the television noticed my joy, and once again I found myself in a situation that had not crossed my mind. They asked me with astonished faces: “Are you on the side of the Jews?” I answered them: “I am on the side of the Lord, and it is the ‘sign’ He gives me that makes my heart leap for joy.”

On the 20th of June, I was again traveling to the Holy Land

because the Lord was sending me. Everyone was telling me that it was dangerous to travel to Israel at that time, but I could do nothing other than obey the Lord; it is an impelling force that cannot be resisted once one has entered it. Now it was the Jews who distrusted me, and they questioned me because I had left Jerusalem, Jordan, a few days before the war and was returning immediately after. I could only answer the truth: “That was the Lord’s Will; all I did was obey.” On this my second stay in the Holy Land (I say second, though in reality it was the third time I came to the Holy Land; I came for the first time on July 2, 1957), I stayed a few days in the new city of Jerusalem at the convent of the Franciscan Sisters while I waited for permission to cross over to the old city in order to continue my contact with the Franciscan Fathers who already knew of the “Message”, Fr. José Barriuso and Fr. Manuel Miguéns who had reviewed the book for its publication.

When I crossed over to the old city of Jerusalem, I stayed at a house of some Polish nuns. During this time, the Lord revealed to me some aspects of His life as “the son of man” and the evolution of His human nature upon His contact with men who were around Him. This knowledge was written in the form of a book entitled “*Hagamos al Hombre*” [“Let us make Man”]; the Lord let me know that I should entrust these writings to Fr. M. Miguéns, and this is what I did. In the month of October, I returned to Venezuela, my place of residence.

In 1968, the Lord again sent me to the Holy Land, this time *expressly* to Bethlehem.

While I was in Bethlehem, staying at the Casa Nova, the Lord continued to give me the declarations or explanations of the drawings of the book “Pilgrimage of the People of God”

(which were not done when Father Barriuso told me to limit myself to the Scriptural texts) which I had already begun to write in Venezuela. Later I learned that at the very moment in which the Lord began to give it to me in Venezuela, Father Barriuso had expressed to the Lord his desire that this be done, and once again I was able to realize how the human liberty can impede or cooperate in the Work of God, and that God truly fulfills the desires of man's heart, even though these may go against His Work in man himself. For this reason, the only good thing to desire is that God's Will be done, as we pray in the Our Father.

In January, 1969, I finished writing in Bethlehem the book "Explanation of the Drawings", also presented by Father Barriuso. During my stay in Bethlehem, Father Barriuso, who was residing in Jerusalem, would sometimes come to the Casa Nova where I was staying. He was the only person with whom I communicated, for I did not get to know the Fathers of Bethlehem except by sight.

In 1970, I again came to the Holy Land in order to finish some points about the book, which book had also been reviewed by Fr. M. Miguéns. In 1972, the Lord again sent me to Bethlehem, and I stayed at the convent of the Missionary Sisters of Mary. On this occasion, I met Fathers Raffaele Angelisanti and Giacinto Napoli who became interested in the Lord's Message, after having some conversations about it. After this encounter, on May 23rd of the same year, I went by Will of the Lord to Lake Tiberias; Father Barriuso accompanied me. While I was there, the Lord made known to me that I should publish a Message I had received in three parts when I was in Madrid, Spain, on March 3, 1971. This I did in a small booklet that was printed in Ramallah with the title "*A los hombres de la Nueva Tierra*" ["To the men of the New

Earth”], and the printing was finished in June. Then I returned to Venezuela.

In November of 1972, the Lord once again sent me to Bethlehem. I stayed at the convent of the Missionary Sisters of Mary. I continued to have frequent contact with Fathers Barriuso, Raffaele, and Giacinto, always in conversations about the Message of the Lord. Father Raffaele expressed his desire that some explanation be given regarding the drawings that appear in the booklet “To the men of the New Earth”. I tried to answer his request in writing, telling him that on my own I could not do it if the Lord Himself did not give me the light and energy to write about this; but the more I wrote the more I received the light and energy for expressing the very thing that Father Raffaele had asked me regarding the drawings and which I was saying I could not do. I wrote for nine² days, every time the light and energy came for doing so, at the same time sending to Father Raffaele what I was writing. This was the sprout of what is today the book “The New Earth”, which was formed through “conversations” with the aforementioned Fathers who know “the Message”, mainly with Father Raffaele who is the one who presents the book.

In August of 1973, the Lord again sent me to Bethlehem. In the month of October, when the Yom Kippur War was starting, while I was in Bethlehem staying at the convent of the Missionary Sisters of Mary, a group of persons who

² The original mistakenly reads “six” instead of *nine*. According to the person who wrote the letter, this error was due to a confusion with the six days spent in drafting the booklet *A los hombres de la Nueva Tierra*. Because of the same confusion, the original of the accompanying letter of the three Friars (cf. Doc. 18, p.146) incorrectly states that the above-mentioned booklet was drafted in “nine” days instead of *six*.

together with me try to make a life of the Lord's Message, orienting their liberty to the fulfillment of His Will, came from Venezuela and took lodgings at the convent where I was staying. A few days after the arrival of this family with small children, the Sisters of the convent told us that we could not continue to stay there because they would be faced with a difficult situation with the children and having to feed them if the war continued. I expressed to Father Barriuso the difficult situation we were in, and he suggested that I speak to the Acting Custos Fr. Maurilio Sacchi to see if he could permit us to stay in the house at the Milk Grotto. After having consulted with the Lord, I went to speak to Father Maurilio who received me amiably, telling me that he would speak with the Father Guardian of the Bethlehem Monastery. Two days later, with the authorization of the Father Guardian Justo Artaraz and of the one responsible for the Milk Grotto, Fr. Antonio Baro, we came to stay in the house of the Milk Grotto where, thanks to the Lord and to the instruments whom He could use, we were able to continue in Bethlehem, according to His Will, until the month of January of the following year when I returned to Venezuela.

In August of the same year 1974, the Lord again sent me to Bethlehem. A young Italian by the name of Giovanni Galassi, who has chosen to live the Message of the Lord, came with me. We stayed at the Casa Nova of Bethlehem for a few days. Later, since a group of persons interested in the same kind of life according to the Lord's Message was coming from Venezuela, we rented a house in Bet-Jala where we lived for six months, engaged in the translation of the book "*La Nueva Tierra*" into Italian, English, and French. Because some difficulties arose for the renewal of the contract for the house that we were occupying, we were invited by the Father

Guardian Giacinto Napoli to come again to stay in the house at the Milk Grotto with the consent of Fr. Modesto Reza, who was in charge of the place. Since then, there has always been here some person of the group who has chosen to live in conformity with the Lord's Will.

In 1976, while in Venezuela, I received a letter from Father Raffaele, dated May 30th of the same year, in which he informed me that the book of the Message of the Lord, "The New Earth", presented by him, would be edited by the Custody of the Holy Land, over which fact I rejoice with all my heart since this means an initial opening up to the Lord's Word contained in His Message; but this is not enough. To be able to "savor" the life of liberation that this Message contains, it is necessary to be thoroughly acquainted with it. As I said before, it is not for preaching by word alone but by the commitment of one's life in order to be transformed by the force of the "living word" that it contains. Only in this way will it be possible for each one to come to the consciousness necessary for the personal decision that the Lord requests, and which I have expressed at the beginning of this writing.

It is required, therefore, that there be a place in the Holy Land, according to the Lord's Will, destined to "gather" the experience lived by the people who come to have contact with the Message, where the persons who seek to live the same ideal may meet, just as we have been doing here at the Milk Grotto in a provisional way without official acceptance by the Custody for said purpose.

It seems to me that it is the request the Lord is making of the Franciscans, custodians of the Holy Land, following their acceptance of the mission that is being offered to them. It is to ask for "lodging" for those who have "conceived" the Word of the Lord and want to "give birth" in themselves to

the “New Creature”, born not of carnal will nor of the will of men, but of the Will of God.

On you, brothers, depends whether this “New Creature” is born within or without the Custody of the Holy Land.

I ask that this letter be published for the knowledge of all the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land.

May our Lord Jesus Christ, together with his Most Holy Mother and St. Joseph, enlighten your decision according to the Divine Will.

the slave of the Lord

DOCUMENT 18

Bethlehem, Milk Grotto
December 1, 1977

Dear brothers,

May we introduce Señorita Josefina Chacín's letter "To the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land" with a brief exposition of the events that have preceded and occasioned it, events in which we, in part, have been personally involved and about which we now feel the need and duty to inform you. We believe we have no right to keep for ourselves alone that to which we have been witnesses.

Of the three of us, the first one who met Señorita Josefina was Father Barriuso, twelve years ago. It is he who has seen to the publication of several books in which the Señorita has come to express the "Message" that emerges from a most special experience of hers, which we will touch upon further on. The first of these books was published by the Custody of the Holy Land in March of 1967. We two, Raffaele and Giacinto, had our first contact with the ideas expressed in these writings through more or less lively conversations with Father Barriuso during recreation time in our fraternity of Bethlehem, beginning in May of 1972. Our desire to know the source of these ideas opened the way to our meeting with Señorita Josefina, who in those days was in Bethlehem, staying at the convent of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary.

The interest aroused in us by our first conversation grew little by little in the meetings that followed. We were immedi-

ately attracted by the profundity of the thought united to an extraordinary simplicity. Although dwelling principally on the intrinsic value of the doctrine, deliberately putting into brackets the problem of its origin, we could not but take more and more into consideration the hypothesis that this wonderful knowledge could have been truly received by her from the Lord, as she never ceases to affirm. This profound metaphysical-theological intuition of reality would have had its origin in a sudden, dazzling experience of the “Being who is”, experience described in some of her writings and of which she has spoken to us more than once with abundant details. The initial global vision has become more and more explicit to her through her encounter with the persons whom the Lord has placed in her path one by one in the most varied circumstances.

From her encounter with the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land – in the persons of some of the religious of the Bethlehem fraternity, there has originated the most complete explication to date of the aforementioned experience by means of drawings and their corresponding written explanation. This is how the booklet *To the men of the New Earth* was born in six days, which booklet was printed in Ramallah in June of 1972. To satisfy a desire expressed by Father Raffaele, this booklet would be enlarged upon in November of the same year – at a single stroke and almost as if from dictation – in a new writing, more voluminous and more deeply developed, which constitutes the nucleus of the book *The New Earth*, finished a little later in Venezuela where the work of translation from the original Spanish into the Italian, French, and English languages began immediately in collaboration with a group of people who live the same ideal: Giovanni Galassi, Italian; Betty Lynn Viney, Canadian;

Angela McLoughlin, Columbian-Venezuelan; and Bertha Beracasa, North American. The translation was continued in Bethlehem in the autumn of 1974 in a house near Bet-Jala. In the spring of 1975, through the initiative of Fr. Giacinto Napoli, then Guardian of the Franciscan Monastery of Bethlehem, the group moved to the Milk Grotto, where some of them had previously stayed in the final months of 1973. The group of translators, united in the spirit of the Lord, was joined by Father Raffaele and Sister Simone Delange, French, of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary in Bethlehem.

In April of 1976, owing to some facts that were very significant for us with respect to the book and the “Message” contained in it, we went to the Custos, Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, to express to him our state of mind and the responsibility that we personally felt to make known the book entrusted to us. The Custos was very understanding and suggested to us that We express our desire in writing to the Discretorium of the Holy Land.

In our letter to the Discretorium, dated May 1, 1976, among other things, we said the following: *“The publishing of the book has been entrusted to us because it is her conviction that the Franciscans, and in particular those of the Holy Land, have a special role to play in relation to the Message”*.

The Discretorium – after ample discussion and after having obtained from a Franciscan theologian of the Province of Milan, Fr. Vittorino Joannes, a written judgment on the book, according to usual practice – authorized its publication in the name of the Custody of the Holy Land.

The book, printed in Milan, is now ready in the Spanish and Italian editions. The English and French editions are almost finished.

The letter we are presenting is closely related to the book *The New Earth* and to all the facts connected with it. Asked personally by the Father Custos to express her desire in writing, Señorita Chacín has felt it her duty to address her reply not to the Custos or to the Discretorium, but to all the Franciscans of the Custody taken individually. We point out that the letter is not the usual “request for something” but, rather, an appeal to the consciences, and an answer to profound aspirations felt and expressed by not a few religious of the Custody.

For this purpose, we wish to transcribe a testimony of ours from a letter of August 29, 1977, addressed to the Discretorium of the Holy Land, in which we asked that the sprout of spiritual life born at the Milk Grotto be cared for: *“In over five years of contact with the people committed to living the ‘Message’, we have been able to verify with our own eyes that it is not just a matter of words or abstract principles, but rather of an experience lived to the fullest that bears witness of itself. It is a living reality, evangelical and Franciscan, that has become deeply engraved in our consciences and which we feel the need to make known to our confreres and to all who are thirsty for eternal life. Perhaps there has been born, or has been given to us as a gift, that something which we all, more or less consciously, have long desired and which in the last Custodial Chapter, when spiritual themes were being discussed, we sought with the anguished question so often repeated in the meeting hall: ‘What are we to do?’ We are deeply convinced that spiritual realities are not ‘created’ by human decisions and measures but are ‘born’ and are received ‘as a gift’, as is everything that is life and divine life. The one thing that is being asked of us is that we take care of this sprout of life and help it to grow*

there where it is.”

The call that today is being addressed to us means for us, first of all, the duty to give “lodging” not to persons but to the “reality” they announce, so that the lived experience to which we have been witnesses may become realized in us as well.

With wishes of Peace and Good.

Fr. José Barriuso

Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti

Fr. Giacinto Giuseppe Napoli

Personal Reflections

“... by His grace I came to consciousness of the unconsciousness in which I was living...” (p.138).

The full coming-to-consciousness can only be the result of the experience of the Being. By full coming-to-consciousness is meant consciousness of the Being, consciousness of the All (the Being) and of the “nothingness” (the human entity we are). This coming-to-consciousness is a grace one receives; it is not, therefore, the fruit of our personal effort. Grace and personal effort are not at odds with each other, but quite the opposite. The human being must put all his drive into living and seeing himself as that which he is: nothing; this nothingness is put into practice in the hustle and bustle of daily life through self-denial. In order to come to consciousness, it is necessary to become aware of the unconsciousness in which we were living before. The unconsciousness is not discovered while one is in it. When we live in the unconsciousness, we believe that it is the only possible way to exist. It is only after the awakening that the unconsciousness appears like a dream, like illusion itself. The great mysticism has given testimony of this awakening. So, for example, Chuang Tzu says: *“Only with a great awakening can we understand the great dream in which we live.”* Buddha used to say: *“It could be that a man suffers no physical illness for five, ten, or a hundred years. But there’s no doubt that all humanity suffers from mental alienation.”* Buddhism is nothing other than seeking to dis-alienate man, that is to say, to successfully bring about

his awakening. Heraclitus used to say: “*Mortals, as all are, being awake, are asleep.*” Jesus Christ said: “*For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*” In the great mysticism, the consciousness of the nothingness has been the path of the awakening. “*That the time of mankind’s ‘evolution’ in the knowledge of good and evil is coming to an end...*” (p.138).

The evolution of man is ordinarily understood in a one-sided way, in the sense of historical evolution. When this term is used in the Message, it is applied not only in the sense of historical evolution, but in the sense of evolution in the spirit as well. Evolution in the spirit is more real and profound than the simple historical evolution; the latter is only a derivative of the former. The spiritual evolution of man is indissolubly linked to the evolution of the angelic reality – the gods. In a given moment of the human evolution, in a particular individual, the divine spark irrupts. This first individual is he who is designated in the Bible by the name of Adam. This man Adam is the beginning of spirituality, that is, of the possibility of the *presence* of the Being in the human entity. But this first man – divine – was not faithful to his identification with the Being; rather, he oriented himself to himself, he left the Creator for the creature; instead of *being*, he set his heart on *doing*, after the example of the angel – the gods; instead of surrendering himself to Love, he sought power. Adam was warned by God from the beginning that he should not eat of the forbidden tree. The “knowledge of good and evil” was only the result of the disobedience that took place in the first man – divine. The fact that he disobeyed God and consequently oriented himself to the creature was what brought about his being driven out of Eden, and his being obliged thereafter to earn his sustenance through the efforts of his

human faculties. Good and evil are not mere moral categories, but rather that constant struggle in man due to his “knowing” that he can return to the lost Paradise and that to do so, he can only count on his mere human possibilities. From this one can infer and understand the highly important role of the human faculties. This endeavoring to return to the house of the Being on the basis of the human faculties is the unconsciousness itself. In fallen man, the good represents the nostalgia in him – impossible to elude – for the divine Reality which beats in the depths of his being. This divine spark present in every human being constantly calls and beckons him, and this heir of Adam has gone completely astray by endeavoring to journey back by means of the merely human. This is how Jesus of Nazareth saw it: “*Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block for me; you are not judging by God’s standards but by man’s*” (Mt 16:23). Hence, evil is represented by the absolutization of the human.

When spiritual evolution is mentioned, it is meant that some individuals come to the consciousness that the human does not constitute the true essence of man. Thus, for example, Lao Tzu in China, Buddha in India, Parmenides in Greece are eminent examples of the recognition that the essence of man is not in the human but in the Being. On this path of spiritual evolution, Jesus Christ represents the apex of the coming-to-consciousness of the human – the nothingness, and of the All – the Being. Jesus Christ represents not only a dividing line in historical chronology but also a before and after with respect to man’s spiritual evolution. After Jesus Christ, the only thing left for man to do is put His teaching into practice: the denial of self as the only path to redemption. In the hour we are living, we have also arrived at a crucial moment in the historical evolution. By historical evolution we

understand the coming-to-be of man who regards himself as the protagonist of his own life, that is to say, the human reality resulting from the interaction or dialectical play of the different components of this human reality. In the historical moment we are living, the human being cannot find in himself, in the human, any possible incentive for giving full meaning to his life. It can be said that the human quarry is already exhausted in the sense of finding there profound motivations for existing. Does this mean man's power of election is exhausted or is becoming exhausted?

The spiritual evolution and the historical evolution shake hands in the man of today. This is what is meant to be indicated when the end of time is mentioned: *man is arriving today at the end of time.*

With regard to spiritual evolution, we are at a most decisive crossroads: either we resolutely orient ourselves to the Being, or else we lose the possibility of returning to "Paradise"; we lose the opportunity of opportunities, that is, to live our lives in the house of the Being.

In his historical evolution, the man of today finds himself at a dead end. If our species were to persist in identifying essentially with the human, it would find itself threatened with death by man himself. It can no longer be maintained that the reason, the will, and the affections are our essential house. It is urgent that the old man – the man identified with thought, will, and affections – make way for the new man. Man can no longer postpone his coming-to-consciousness of the fact that the Being is the only way out. The hour has arrived in which man is being offered the real opportunity to leave the tents of the human and to begin living in the Definitive, in the Eternal. It is the moment for him to carry out his final election.

“... man must freely and consciously affirm his decision in the *Being* or in the ‘non-being’” (p.138).

Man can affirm his decision in the *Being* or in the “non-being”. Affirming himself in the *Being* involves forsaking his free will, renouncing his thought as source of Truth, and relinquishing his attachments. Affirming oneself in the “non-being” is to orient oneself toward oneself, that is to say, to take one’s human faculties as the perspective for viewing reality.

“...in ‘being’ or in ‘doing’” (p.138).

“*Doing*” implies the coming-into-play of the human faculties oriented toward the reinforcement of the entity, already wrapped up in itself. The “doing” can apply to the visible as well as the invisible. Whenever it’s a matter of “doing”, the *I* is always present as one of the poles of reality. In contrast, “*being*” means an empty *I* filled by the *Being*; the conflict between the *I* and the non-*I* is transcended, harmonized by the disclosure of the *Being*.

“...in *God* or in the creature” (p.138).

Identifying oneself with *God* (*God* is understood here as a synonym for the *Being*) implies having transcended one’s dependency on the entity, taking a leap into the void, and then in passivity finding oneself in this void with *God*. Nevertheless, up to the present day, humanity has lived its life on the basis of its identification with the creature.

“...in *Love* or in *Power*” (p.138).

Love is the renunciation of one’s self for the sake of the *Being*. Love is the *Being*; the total surrender to the *Being* is the highest state a human being can attain in his evolution. It is this Love that liberates us from our attachments and at the

same time gives us the possibility of being able to “surrender ourselves” to creatures. The love for one’s neighbor that Jesus Christ speaks about is possible only if there has previously been a total surrender to the Father. When we totally surrender ourselves to the Being, He in turn floods us with His Love. This is the plenitude of existence.

“.. in God’s Will or in His permission” (p.138).

Living in the Will is to live in Love, in the Being, to place ourselves in the hands of Providence: *“Seek first the kingdom of God and all else will be given you besides”*. The permission is the terrain of the unconsciousness, living with one’s back to the Being, oriented to oneself.

“And it is to the Franciscans, custodians of the Holy Places, to whom this mission is first offered, mission which must be accepted or rejected freely and consciously by each one, for this is not a Message that can be preached by word alone; rather, along with the preaching of it goes the committing of one’s life in order to be transformed by the force of the ‘living word which the Message contains, bringing about in each one the coming-to-consciousness necessary for his personal decision” (p.138).

The Message is offered to the Franciscans of the Holy Land so that they might be the first in charge of presenting this *word* of the Being to the world. Why to the Franciscans? Because the Franciscans are the direct heirs of the *message* of Francis of Assisi, according to which the Gospel should be taken up and lived in all its radicality, that which the Saint called *Lady Poverty*. Francis recognized the universality of the Gospel, which Gospel was not the exclusive property of Christians, but, rather, a *message* for all humanity. Why to the Franciscans of the Holy Land? Because the Holy Land is the

Promised Land and symbolizes the superior Reality present in man, to which the Man must “return” by coming to the consciousness of his true *being*. “*This is the ‘return’, not only the return of man to that state which the first man had in Paradise, before disobeying God and subjecting himself to the creature, but also the continuation of that which was begun and which could not be realized in the first man for his not having obeyed God and not having affirmed his liberty in the Divine Will. By ‘Promised Land’ I understand the Divine reality that is found in man and toward which he must ‘journey as a pilgrim’ each day, each instant of his life, denying himself: ‘If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself...’*” (p. 141). It is through the Franciscans that the Message was proposing to awaken the sleeping consciousness of Christianity, in the sense that it was urgent and imperative that the *word* of the Gospel be taken in all seriousness, that is to say, that the postulate proposed by Jesus Christ regarding self-denial be received in all its radicality: “*My food is to do the Will of Him who sent me...*”

Now then, it must be insistently stressed that the Message is a *message* of the Being; and this means that it is addressed to all men without distinctions of race or creed. In its deepest meaning the Message is a call to all believers of all creeds that they might assume with all seriousness the Truth contained in their respective sacred books. That is to say, the Message is not partial to any creed in particular, nor is it one more *message* in search of proselytes; much less does it seek to create a new religious cult, but presents itself as the summary and synthesis of all previous authentic revelations: it is the Being Himself who gathers into one His previous revelations in the course of Man’s pilgrimage on earth. It is true that the Message uses, in good measure, the language of the Bible, but

this is due to the fact that the person who receives the Message, after having received it, had contacts, first of all, with Catholic priests, and having come to know the Bible, she found in it the language appropriate for expressing the Experience of the Being that she had had. This person, although a baptized Catholic Christian, had no religious formation.

But the Message goes far beyond the peculiarities of the religious tradition of Jews and Christians. The Message adopts the Biblical language because it was necessary first of all to awaken Christians. But Christians have not been the only ones who have been unfaithful in the fulfillment of their particular creed; rather it can be said that at the present time the true religious spirit is dormant and devitalized in all latitudes of the planet. Hence, it is imperative to translate this Message into the language of the other doctrines and religions.

To my way of viewing it, the essence of the Message is summarized in the affirmation made in it that every manifestation of the Being is liberty, and that, in turn, the essence of liberty is the nothingness. This manifestation-liberty possesses a definitive double option: either it orients itself toward the Being, its true *being*, or else it orients itself toward itself. When the second option is chosen, what is then produced is the going-astray, the emergence of the realm of the illusory, what we know generically as entity. This physical world and the invisible worlds are the result of the going-astray of the manifestation-liberty. It follows that what conscious free beings are facing, as their decisive and absolute issue, is that the preeminence of the Being be reestablished in their lives. For reestablishing the preeminence of the Being, there is only one path: that the free beings surrender their liberty to the

Being in a total and unconditional way, which means that in our day-to-day living we disqualify the I-ego in all its manifestations through the denial of self.

Now then, from this thesis of the liberty-nothingness, we can approach and dialogue with the great revealed doctrines: with Buddhism, Taoism, the pre-Socratics, Hinduism and, of course, with Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The Message is not the property of any cultural tradition in particular but is the *word* that the Being directs to the men of today so that, once and for all, the preeminence of the Being may be established. This is clearly expressed in this letter-message to the Franciscans of the Holy Land in which we are told: *“As to ‘People of God’ the Lord has made known to me that they are all the human beings, irrespective of race, nation or religion who, having reached a higher state of evolution, attain in themselves the faith of Abraham, renouncing the different manifestations of their egoistic self represented in the words that God said to Abraham: ‘Leave your country, and your kinsfolk, and your father’s house leaving in this way the simple natural life, impelled by human energy• = will of creatures, towards a supernatural life, impelled by Divine energy = Will of God, state that we have seen realized in Jesus Christ: ‘My food is to do the Will of my Father. . .’, and then, ‘Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from me; yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt’ “(p. 140). The same thing was communicated to Moses: “Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples, . . . “(Ex. 19:5).*

According to the language of the Bible the “people of God” is Israel, the chosen people. Even though the Message acknowledges an eminent place for the people of Israel, it is, nevertheless, to be observed that Israel denotes, above all, a

spiritual reality; with Israel, a crucial

156moment is fulfilled in man's evolution, evolution that culminated with Jesus Christ, as historical example for all humanity. Although this evolution has culminated with Jesus Christ, Israel continues to represent the stage of man's evolution in the knowledge of good and evil, the Law, the state of all present-day humanity, including Christians. But it is also true for everyone *"that the hour is coming and is now! in which the true worshipers must worship God in spirit and in truth, submitting themselves unconditionally to His Divine Will, after the example of Jesus of Nazareth, because the moment of His Justice is coming. That the time of mankind's 'evolution' in the knowledge of good and evil is coming to an end, and man must freely and consciously affirm his decision in the Being or in the 'non-being' : in 'being or in 'doing'; in God or in the creature; in Love or in Power: in God's Will or in His Permission. And that, in order for man to know and come to consciousness of these realities, it is necessary that His 'Message' be spread from this Holy Land, Scripture thus becoming fulfilled"* - (p.138).

In Jesus Christ the fulfillment of the one, true Law takes place: the unrestricted fulfillment of the Will of the Father. Now then, it is in the role played by Jesus Christ in human destiny where Jews and Christians part company. For the Jews, Jesus Christ remains outside of their religious tradition, that is to say, the Jews do not accept the fact that man's spiritual evolution, which starts with Abraham and continues on through Moses and the prophets, culminates in Jesus of Nazareth. It is important to point out that the Message is very clear and categorical about this: the Old and New Testaments are one and the same revelation. To sever the Bible into two watertight compartments is to remain deaf to a single mes-

sage, a single call from the Being. The rejection of Jesus by the Jews is due only to circumstantial historical reasons. The Jews, remaining with a human sonship in relation to Abraham and the prophets, have not yet recognized the true son-ship which is in the Spirit who was moving Abraham and the prophets. Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew who presented himself before his countrymen as a continuator of the Hebrew spiritual tradition.

Yet the separation between the Old and New Testaments derives not only from the Jews but also from the Christians; for the Christians have exalted and deified Jesus of Nazareth, placing him far above our human possibilities of realization, and separating him, therefore, from the rest of the Hebrew tradition. But the truth is that the Bible, as the Message shows us, is a single body from Genesis to the Apocalypse. Without doubt, this schism between the two Testaments has influenced, in a decisive way, the Jews as well as the Christians insofar as they have not been faithful followers of the word of the Being. The true Israelites and the true Christians are to recognize the mission they have had in the history of humanity as representatives of the man who – as a people – recognizes in his life the preeminence of the Being, as we see it in Abraham, Moses, in all the prophets and patriarchs, and in Jesus of Nazareth and the apostles.

Nevertheless, today Jews as well as Christians are both seated in the chair of the accused: *“The false ‘Christian’, like the false ‘Israel’, has taken from Scripture what is convenient for him and to the extent that it suits him for living better in this world, wanting to enjoy the freedom of the sons of God without having renounced the paternity of the devil, ‘the Sin’, confusing the words of Scripture”*¹. *“The word of God is sealed for the men who live off the ‘world’ and for the world,*

*and also for those who 'live' off the word of God, but what they identify with is the world."*¹

The Message has come so that man might realize the perfect fulfillment of all the great revelations he has received from the Being. For these revelations are not consumed by history but enjoy a permanent and eternal validity. So, for example, the events narrated by the Bible do not remain fixed there, limited to their historical moment, but are a language that speaks directly to the man of today, as if they were events happening-in our day. This present-day efficacy of the Bible could also be applied to all the other great *messages* of the Being, so much so that we could discover that the Bible is not the only book that directly concerns us, the men of today, but that the Vedas, the Tao Te Ching, the Diamond Sutra, the Gita, the Koran are also *messages* full of perpetual newness and Life.

No written answer to the two preceding letters has been received by the persons concerned, from the religious of the Custody. We have learned only of the reaction of Fr. Ignazio Mancini who kindly wished to hand us a copy of his letter to the Custos.

DOCUMENT 19

CASA NOVA-Franciscan Fathers
Jerusalem, Israel

Jerusalem, January 21, 1978

Most Rev. Fr. Maurilio Sacchi
Custos of the Holy Land
St. Saviour's Monastery
Jerusalem

Most Rev. Father Custos,

It is likely that you will find these few lines strange, lines which, nevertheless, I feel I must write.

I refer to the letter sent by Señorita Josefina to the Franciscans of the Custody and presented by Frs. Raffaele Angelisanti, José Barriuso, and Giacinto Napoli.

It is now two years, if I am not mistaken, since I spoke to you of the necessity for founding a center for Christian spiritual renewal, which could receive as its first nucleus the small group of people who, until only a week or so ago, were

staying in our small Milk Grotto residence in Bethlehem.

For my part, I deem that the Lord may want to use the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land to benefit the entire humanity. It is not a matter of making construction projects or organization plans arising from human reason. We have already made so many of them, and the results have not been at all brilliant. It is a matter only of placing oneself in an internal attitude of readiness to fulfill the Will of God and to give lodging to those “*who have conceived the Word of God and want to give birth in themselves to the New Creature born...of the Will of God*”.

Is it necessary to recall that the Christian message is essentially supernatural and that frequently we are asked to risk breaking with the past in order to create new situations?

Most Rev. Father Custos, here is all I wanted to tell you. Now I am glad to have said it. I have not wished to write to the Discretorium in order not to give you other alibi for unloading *a priori* upon a group of people your personal responsibility.

My respects,

Yours faithfully in the Lord,
Friar Ignazio Mancini, O.F.M.

The letter that follows, even though addressed to Father Angelisanti, is the positive answer – with a nine months' delay – to the joint letter of August 29, 1977 (cf. doc. 16, p. 134).

One would, however, search in vain in the Acta Custodiae Terrae Sanctae for the publication of this important discretionary decision.

As a reply to the request for official authorization for the Group to reside at the Milk Grotto, the aforementioned decision is certainly to be held as positive; on the contrary, in relation to the Message itself and to the invitation contained in the last part of the Letter to the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land (cf. doc. 17, p. 138), the position of some Discrets, already from this letter, appears rather hostile.

A certain mistrust, carried into practice in an attitude of an ever-increasing deaf resistance that will later end up in open opposition, had begun with the new Discretorium. The reasons for the attitude have never been made clear, nor has there ever been a meeting with the persons concerned in order to ascertain the validity of certain gossip, quite normal in these kinds of matters, that constituted, so it seems, the only ground for their suspicions, as transpires also from the letter of May 14, 1978 (cf. doc. 21, p.163) in which Father Angelisanti communicates to Señorita Josefina the decision of the Discretorium.

For the incomprehensions that begin to surface since this letter – the first in a written document – see a brief comment in the letter to the Father Visitor dated March 19, 1980 (cf. doc. 52, p. 261).

DOCUMENT 20

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

St. Saviour's, May 7, 1978

Dear Father Raffaele,

With reference to the request presented by you to the Discretorium of the Holy Land, dated August 28, 1977, and also signed by Frs. Giuseppe Napoli and José Barriuso, I have the pleasure of communicating to you that it has been decided to officially authorize the Group in question to reside in the House at the Milk Grotto.

This decision, in any case, is included in the fact that the Custody, attentive to the needs of some spiritual groups, has already given evidence of its sensitivity by granting the use of the Little Convent of the Desert of St. John to the Theophany community and declaring itself disposed to permit other groups as well, who might request it, the use of our houses whenever they are available.

The Discretorium of the Holy Land does not consider that it has any particular reasons for giving or refusing permission to some of our religious to frequent this Group.

At the same time, however, it wants to bring to the attention of the persons concerned that the diffusion of the Message sent to all the friars of the Custody has created a certain uneasiness and a strong perplexity in our religious, especially because of the fact that it was being presented as a Message officially approved by the Custody.

Moreover, without wanting to judge this Message in the

least way, the Discretorium feels it its duty to stress the priority of the evangelical and Franciscan message which must be kept intact in the Holy Places – places that must not, therefore, be used to propagandize movements or devotions that are not proper to them (cf. Statutes of the Holy Land, Art. 84).

With sentiments of deep esteem and with all good wishes in the name of the Lord, I send you my cordial and fraternal greetings.

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

DOCUMENT 21

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY
Bethlehem

Bethlehem, May 14, 1978

Dear Josefina,

I am sending you the answer that the Father Custos, on behalf of the Discretorium of the Holy Land, has communicated to me apropos of the request made on August 29, 1977.

The road traveled has been long and bristling with difficulties. I personally believe that the official authorization given by the Discretorium is something positive, even though in the rest of the letter the Discretorium cares to focus on certain aspects of the problem.

I would be glad to know your opinion in reference to this so that in the future I, as well as Fathers Napoli and Barriuso, may know what to do. In these kinds of problems, there is always the danger that human factors may creep in, which can

obstruct the work of the Lord, perhaps even in the belief that these are favoring it.

Before the Custos sent me the answer, I met with him. He had already let me know, substantially, the contents of the letter, and had told me that he had found a certain opposition in the Discretorium. His personal opinion had prevailed because it was based not on hearsay from third parties, which the majority of the Discrets made use of in their discussions, but on convictions formed in his encounter with you.

As to the content of the last paragraph of the letter, wanted by the Discrets, this is not shared by the Custos. He personally maintains that the “Message” is in full conformity with the evangelical and Franciscan message.

The Custos, moreover, when I met with him, asked me for a personal opinion regarding the contents of the letter. I answered him that it was my desire that in the letter there be clearly expressed, without any simulations or expedient words, what was the precise opinion of the Discretorium considered in its representative majority. The reflection meetings continue as usual. Tomorrow evening, we will finish the answers to the second booklet. We will then begin the reading of the third booklet. The interest is very strong; the discoveries made are always interesting and vital. We hope that the Spirit may continue to assist and sustain us in our weakness and frailty.

United in prayer, I greet you affectionately together with all the brothers there.

Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

V

A PROGRESSIVE COMING-TO-CONSCIOUSNESS
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE

Documents 22-42

Father Barriuso, as a result of his first trip to Mexico which had taken place in June of 1976, receives from a group of persons acquainted with the Message an invitation to return to Mexico once again for the purpose of going deeper into the contents of the same Message; he requests permission of the Discretorium for this but does not obtain it.

Owing to a second invitation received from Mexico, he repeats his request. Another refusal by the Discretorium. His going or not, being a matter of a case of conscience, is now left by the Acting Custos to the personal decision of the person concerned.

DOCUMENT 22

Bethlehem, June 3, 1978

The Very Rev. Father Custos
St. Saviour's Monastery
Jerusalem

Very Reverend Father,

Yesterday afternoon, I received a telephone call in which I was asked to give an answer as to whether I can go to Mexico.

The request is made by a group of people who have had news of the "Message" which the Lord is imparting to humanity from here. The news reached them through the books that were introduced in Mexico at the time of my trip

there two years ago, on which occasion Señorita Josefina read the books to them and explained them.

Ever since then, the persons who were reached by this news and became interested in it have been meeting once a week in one of the homes in order to read and meditate on the books in which the “Message” is contained and explained.

They now wish to go deeper into this knowledge with reading and meditating on the new knowledge that over the last two years the Lord has continued to give, particularly in the newly-published book *The “New Earth”*. They want me to go there again in order to continue what was begun two years ago, and this is the reason for their call.

Therefore, I feel it my duty in conscience to inform Your Paternity of all this in order to be able to reply to the request being made from Mexico. I hope that Your Paternity will let me know your opinion with respect to this request.

As to my service at the Milk Grotto, there is no problem at all. It would be taken care of in case I should absent myself – as it was two years ago in my absence – by the persons who are presently here under the direct and immediate responsibility of Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti with whom I have spoken about it, and he is in agreement.

I wish you every good in the Lord.

Friar José Barriuso

DOCUMENT 23

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

Jerusalem

Israel

June 13, 1978

Dear Father José,

The Venerable Discretorium in its meeting of the 12th of this month has examined your request.

Given the circumstances in which we find ourselves and the negative answer given to others in similar cases, the Venerable Discretorium has not thought it opportune to grant the requested permission.

This has been done in order not to create precedents or make distinctions that would create discontent.

Fraternal greetings,

Fr. Teofilo Gori, O.F.M.
Secretary of the Custody

DOCUMENT 24

Bethlehem, November 10, 1978

Very Reverend Fr. Acting Custos
St. Saviour's Monastery Jerusalem

Very Reverend Father,

Last September I sent a letter to the Most Rev. Father

Custos and to the Venerable Discretorium in which I asked to go to Mexico. The reply was negative.

Through a telephone call received the day before yesterday, I was again asked to go to Mexico as soon as possible.

Personally, I feel the obligation to make the same request of last September in obedience to the Lord's Will, which I see is revealed to me in relation to the "Message" about which Your Paternity is well informed.

The renewed request from Mexico has, I believe, a precise significance of its own that should be taken into consideration.

Consider the problem in the Lord, and please give me an answer. Greetings and best wishes.

José Barriuso

DOCUMENT 25

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

St. Saviour's, November 14, 1978

Rev. Fr. José Barriuso
In-charge-of the Milk Grotto

Dear Father José,

Your request made in your letter of the 10th of this month has been examined in yesterday's discretorial session. The Discretorium, composed of eight members, has expressed itself in the following manner: four have been against, confirming the refusal of last September; the other four have

remained “undecided”. The undersigned, keeping in mind what has recently happened in regard to the “Message”, has thought well to say nothing in order not to renew useless and inconclusive arguments about the meaning of the “Message”.

Our meeting of yesterday evening at the Milk Grotto and my having learned all that has happened, precisely yesterday, with regard to the plane ticket offered to you by a pilgrim, have placed me in a serious and delicate problem of conscience. I have examined and pondered everything in the light of what I know, through personal experience, in relation to the “Message”, in order that I may act in full conformity with my personal responsibilities.

I quote for you what is said in Article 56, Paragraph 2, of our General Constitutions.¹ *“The provincial Ministers may grant to the friars under their jurisdiction permission to travel within the limits of their own continent. But in order to grant permission to travel outside of these limits, the permission of their Definitorium is required.”*

After long reflecting, it is clear to me that my personal powers, given the decision of the Discretorium, do not extend to the fact of granting the requested permission. Personally, I consider that the grounds presented for justifying your request are in perfect correspondence with the “aims and spirit of our religious profession”. Since you have called my attention to the fact that you feel obligated in conscience to act in conformity with what you have requested, as your major superior I believe I can tell you to conduct yourself according to such conscience.

Affectionate greetings,

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.
Acting Custos

In September of 1978, the printing of the book The “New Earth” in four languages was finished.

In the letter that follows, Señorita Josefina reminds Father Angelisanti of the commitment made by the Custody for contributing towards the publication costs.

DOCUMENT 26

Mexico, November 27, 1978

Dear and remembered Father Raffaele,

For quite a while now I have wished to write you but have been unable to do so. For some time now, it has been very difficult for me to write; I feel that a deep silence is taking place within me, and it is very difficult for me to express to people what I feel and would like to communicate, but if this is the Will of the Lord, it is the best thing that can happen to me.

All of us have been very glad over Father Barriuso’s arrival; the group desired it, and I believe that his coming, given the circumstances, has a deeper meaning than what can be seen at a simple glance. I believe that it has been a step towards a higher coming-to-consciousness and that, through this “coming-to-consciousness”, the Lord will be able to manifest in him and in others His Divine Will in these such difficult and definitive moments that it has been our lot to

live.

Yesterday, Giovanni arrived from Venezuela on his way to Israel. On the first of the month, if the Lord so wants it, we will leave for Santa Fe where Bertha is repairing a house where the Message will be given and the books distributed, beginning with "The New Earth" which is the only one translated into English. She is very enthusiastic and completely at the Lord's disposal.

With Giovanni, I am sending you the balance for the printing of the books of The New Earth, according to what you communicated to Giovanni by telephone. Giovanni informed me, and I immediately made arrangements to obtain the required sum. Your call and request leads me to think that the Custody of the Holy Land has decided not to collaborate financially with the printing of the books; it is important, Father Raffaele, that the Discretorium of the Holy Land be conscious of all the steps that are progressively taken with respect to the Lord's Message, for I am more and more convinced that this is not something of men but of God and that each decision of the instruments has a significance in terms of eternity, and each one must be conscious of what he does. Judgment, indeed, belongs to the Lord and not to us, but we must act in *CONSCIENCE*. In conscience I have believed that I should send you the required amount, for on our part we must give our *ALL* in benefit of the Lord's Work, including our very life. In conscience I also tell you that it is *necessary* that the Custody of the Holy Land get a clear picture of things just as they are so that their decisions may be conscious before the Lord. I have not gone to you out of my own initiative but because the Lord has wanted it so; I have no interest whatsoever in the Holy Land or in the Holy Places other than to fulfill the Will of the Lord, and He alone will be

able to decide our stay in the Holy Land and any other place that He Himself may determine for us, for only He knows when men's liberty has closed the door to His Will. My part is only to be ever alert and vigilant in order to know what God may dispose, and to do this I must keep myself unbribable in the face of any human sentiment for or against the persons around me, the human beings; only God's Will must move me.

The amount sent is USA\$35,000.00 (Thirty-five thousand American dollars) in two checks as follows: No. 94167 in the amount of \$20,000.00 and No. 94166 in the amount of \$15,000.00, both checks drawn against the Chase Manhattan Bank, New York, U.S.A. This amount together with what I delivered previously comes to the sum of USA\$63,255.81 plus a sum delivered by Bertha for a total of \$15,000.00
\$78,255.81

This amount should be returned to the people who lent the money as the books are sold. I was saying to Giovanni today that it seems to me that on the cost of each book, a little should be surcharged to cover those books that are to be given gratis to people who have no means for acquiring them and who are interested in the Message, and also to pay for shipping costs, etc; the difference between the cost (with the surcharge) and the sale price would be for the distributors since they too have their expenses. This is what seems fair to me. What do you think? I also think that Giovanni might take charge of the administration or collection of the book monies, for if the Custody, as is seen, is not going to handle this, it would all be up in the air, and someone must become responsible for this, don't you think? The things of the Lord must be clear in all aspects and dealt with in justice and in truth.

December 4, 1978, Santa Fe, U.S.A.

Since the first of the month we have been with Bertha. She is repairing a house that belonged to her parents, and we have prepared a room with all the drawings where we receive persons interested in the Message. We have already had meetings with three groups – very interesting. In Mexico we had meetings every day during one month, and there is now a group of more than a hundred persons there doing the Reflections together with others who have not yet begun and who are very interested. Giovanni will tell you all the details of our trip.

I hope in the Lord that in the first months of the year, we will be in Bethlehem with a group of young people, children of Elvira and Amado, and brothers of Maria Elina.

Yllen and Bertha join me in sending you our best wishes in the Lord on this Christmas and New Year, together with all your confreres.

the slave of the Lord

The following letter aims to set the record straight on the solution given to Father Barriuso's case of conscience.

DOCUMENT 27

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

St. Saviour's,
December 11, 1978

Dear Father Raffaele,

The Discretorium of the Holy Land in its session of last December 6th has discussed at length the question of Father Barriuso's trip to Mexico.

It was particularly noted that:

a) What was reported in the Acts of the Discretorium (session of last November 13th) and in your letter sent to Father Barriuso himself (November 14, 1978) is not in keeping with the reality of the facts since, out of the eight members of the Discretorium present at the meeting, the outcome would have been, not of four against and four "undecided", but of five against and three "undecided".

b) Furthermore, your decision to authorize Father Barriuso to act on the basis of his conscience would have been – even though in good faith – a going beyond your powers and, especially, a very negative precedent for the practical conse-

quences it might have, which, in other cases, might create abuses and place the Discretorium of the Holy Land in difficulty.

This is what has been brought out by the Discretorium.

I take this opportunity to present to you my cordial and fraternal greetings, with my best wishes for the coming Christmas season.

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

Father Angelisanti's Note

What is stated in point "a" was due to my erroneous interpretation of what was affirmed by one of the Discrets. What is said in point "b", on the contrary, is in contradiction with what is stated in the next to last paragraph of the letter to which the Discretorium refers. I made no decision to "authorize Father Barriuso to act on the basis of his conscience". Furthermore, in full awareness of what I was doing, after having explicitly recognized my lack of personal powers for granting the requested permission, I wrote: "As your major superior I believe I can tell you to conduct yourself according to such conscience" – a clear and explicit acknowledgment that the conscience constitutes the ultimate, definitive, and indisputable criterion of action for every person.

In the following letter, the Custos, Father Sacchi, points out that the Discretorium insists that a contract be drawn up with the Group already authorized to reside at the Milk Grotto.'

This was not carried out because the Custos was orally reminded of what had previously been said regarding the singularity of the case.

The reasons for not drawing up a contract are mentioned in the letter to the Father Visitor dated March 19, 1980 (cf. doc. 52, p.261).

DOCUMENT 28

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

December 17, 1978

Dear Father Raffaele,

In the discretorial session of last December 6th it was pointed out that, unlike other similar cases, no contract has yet been made for the Milk Grotto granted for the use of Señorita Josefina.

It is insisted, therefore, that action be taken to settle this matter, anticipating also that, within a year and a half, there will be changes in the directorship of the Custody and, perhaps, also in the Convent of Bethlehem, for which reason it is better that matters be clarified in order to avoid misunderstandings later on.

Please see what could be done and how this Contract

should be spelled out.

With cordial and fraternal greetings,

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

The next letter was intended to be an exhaustive presentation of that which relates to the publication of the work The “New Earth”, and calls to mind the commitment assumed by the Custody to contribute financially to the publication of the work. This commitment came to nothing.

DOCUMENT 29

Bethlehem, December 21, 1978

Most Rev. Father Custos,

The other day Mr. Giovanni Galassi arrived from Venezuela. His trip here was requested by me because the moment has arrived for closing accounts with Scotti printers of Milan in relation to the contract drawn up for printing the book The “New Earth”.

I have been handed a letter written to me by Señorita Josefina. Before disclosing to you what directly concerns the Custody, I transcribe for you, almost entirely, what I communicated to Josefina on May 30, 1976: “... *Two days ago, May 28th, during two discretorial sessions held morning and afternoon, the Discretorium of the Holy Land, under the Presidency of the Father Custos, took into consideration the letter that sometime ago Fathers Giacinto, José and I had sent concerning the printing of your book, “The New Earth”.*

The matter was very seriously examined for more than two

hours altogether. The initial presentation made by the Custos was positive and very open to spiritual experiences of this kind. The ensuing interventions by the individual Discrets were, despite my presence, sincere, self-committing, and quite varied and contrasting. No stand taken was substantially contrary to the request. The questions for clarification were multiple and were concerned with your person, your activity, your life, the books already published, the acceptance they have had by the reading public. Precise and detailed questions about the book under consideration have given me the opportunity to briefly explain how and where it was born, the long work of elaboration, and its contents. I have, moreover, thought it opportune to highlight the importance you give to the fact that the book has been written in Bethlehem and that it be made known with some participation by the Custody of the Holy Land, land where for centuries the sons of him [Francis] – who has rediscovered and again presented to the world the genuine Gospel message – have been working.

Because of the way the discussion went, having been offered some proposals with regard to the formalities to be followed in order to allow the printing of the book under the responsibility of the Custody, not knowing what to answer and fearing to go beyond my personal views of the moment, I requested that I be given the possibility to consult with Giovanni and Father Giacinto. After two hours of discussion with these two, despite my personal objections, we resolved to remain faithful to what had been previously decided: we do not think it appropriate that the book be read and examined by others, the confidence that the three signatories of the letter might inspire in the Discretorium sufficing.

In the afternoon session, the discussion moved along a much more theoretical level and removed from any interest of

a financial nature. During this session, I believed it my duty to stress, although in a personal situation of strong inner uneasiness, the seriousness of the negative consequences that might befall the Custody in the case of a complete closing-off to the Message on its part or, worse still, of an explicit refusal. At this point, an accepting attitude toward the Message with an effective participation in its diffusion predominated.

To a specific question of mine as to whether the Custody believed its participation sufficient by the fact that it was allowing three of its religious to concern themselves with the printing and spreading of the Message, I was told that such authorization, even though positive, was considered too small and almost insignificant. The Custody, through the Discretorium, deems it opportune, even necessary, that it have a greater participation in the responsibility for publishing the Message, presenting the book as edited by the Custody of the Holy Land itself. In order to do this, however, it believes it expedient that the following two conditions be agreed to:

1st – Have the book read and examined by Fr, Vittorino Joannes, Franciscan of Milan, co-responsible for the spiritual publications of the Custody, and obtain from him a written statement to this effect, and this in order to conform, at least in part, to the usual practice followed by the Discretorium of the Holy Land in similar circumstances.

It should be kept in mind that the authorizing of such a reading does not imply censorship, the Discretorium having repeatedly stated that it has the utmost confidence in the persons who in some way have collaborated in the preparation of the book.

2nd – Given the present economic-financial situation of the Custody engaged in many and burdensome works of a social nature, the Custody would participate with a contribution for the printing of the book, letting others as well contribute to the diffusion of the word of God.

Lastly, the Custos asked me if I thought you might be opposed to the first condition, that is, allowing the reading of the book by Father Vittorino. The question that was posed to me presented quite grave aspects that immediately surfaced in my conscience. Whatever answer I might give seemed very dangerous to me. From a simple instrument in the hands of the Lord, I could have become a cause for deviating and hindering His work. For this reason, I requested that I might have the opportunity to consult with you before giving an affirmative or negative answer.”

In order that the problem may be present to you in its full spiritual scope I am adding the answer received from Josefina on June 8, 1976:

“I have received your letter of last May 30th in which you inform me of the proposal of the Discretorium of the Custody of the Holy Land relative to the publication of the book ‘The New Earth’. That is:

1st – To have the book read and examined by Fr. Vittorino Joannes, a Franciscan, and to obtain from him a written statement to this effect, keeping in mind that the authorizing of such a reading does not imply censorship for the book, the Discretorium having declared its utmost confidence in the persons who in some way have collaborated in said book.

2nd – That the book would be presented as edited by the Custody of the Holy Land, the Custody participating with a financial contribution to the cost of the publication, leaving

to others the freedom to contribute to the financing as well as to the diffusing of the Message.

Having consulted the Lord, I have seen nothing against the above-mentioned proposal of the Discretorium, which fact I have made known to you by telegram sent yesterday.

Personally, the attitude of the Discretorium seems to me to be very positive and open to the faith. Blessed be the Lord! The fact of their wanting another person to read and examine the book before its publication to me means one more guarantee and a much appreciated help in my difficult position as simple instrument of the Lord, ever fallible in whatever error of expression.

Once again, my part is only to be grateful to the Lord for the fact that He Himself continues to designate the instruments and to open the way by which His Message must reach the men of the 'New Earth'. Whatever the result, it will be the Will of God for me; to this Will, I cling unconditionally."

And now here is the new communication dated November 27, 1978:

"With Giovanni, I am sending you the balance for the printing of the books of The New Earth, according to what you communicated to Giovanni by telephone. Giovanni informed me, and I immediately made arrangements to obtain the required sum. Your call and request leads me to think that the Custody of the Holy Land has decided not to collaborate financially with the printing of the books; it is important, Father Raffaele, that the Discretorium of the Holy Land be conscious of all the steps that are progressively taken with respect to the Lord's Message, for I am more and more convinced that this is not something of men but of God and that each decision of the instruments has a significance in

terms of eternity, and each one must be conscious of what he does. Judgment, indeed, belongs to the Lord and not to us, but we must act in CONSCIENCE. In conscience I have believed that I should send you the required amount, for on our part we must give our ALL in benefit of the Lord's Work, including our very life. In conscience I also tell you that it is necessary that the Custody of the Holy Land get a clear picture of things just as they are so that their decisions may be conscious before the Lord. I have not gone to you out of my own initiative but because the Lord has wanted it so; I have no interest whatsoever in the Holy Land or in the Holy Places other than to fulfill the Will of the Lord, and He alone will be able to decide our stay in the Holy Land and any other place that He Himself may determine for us, for only He knows when men's liberty has closed the door to His Will. My part is only to be ever alert and vigilant in order to know what God may dispose, and to do this I must keep myself unbribable in the face of any human sentiment for or against the persons around me, the human beings; only God's Will must move me.

The amount sent is USA\$35,000.00 (Thirty-five thousand American dollars) in two checks as follows: No. 94167 in the amount of \$20,000.00 and No. 94166 in the amount of \$15,000.00, both checks drawn against the Chase Manhattan Bank, New York, U.S.A. This amount together with what I delivered previously comes to the sum of USA \$63,255.81, plus a sum delivered by Bertha of USA \$15,0000.00, for a total of USA \$78,255.81."

Please examine the whole problem seriously and with the utmost sense of personal responsibility in such a manner that the paths of the Lord may not be closed off to an Institution which, in a thousand ways over the course of more than six

hundred years, has always been highly diligent in diffusing the Gospel “Message” to the entire world.

Please find a way to intervene, perhaps even personally, by making use of the powers granted you by our Statutes for disposing of a certain financial sum.

Having to settle accounts before the end of this month, I await an early reply.

I wish you Christmas greetings, and may the Child of Bethlehem give you sufficient light for the solution of this delicate problem. I ask your blessing.

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

In January, 1979, on the occasion of the visit of Pope John Paul II to Mexico, some persons, who had known Father Barriuso during his stay in that country, offered the Pope a copy of The “New Earth” and of the other books related to the Message, accompanied by the following letter from Father Barriuso.

DOCUMENT 30

[January, 1979]

His Holiness Pope John Paul II
Mexico

Holiness,

I address Your Holiness following an exigency of my conscience, given the circumstances in which I find myself now and for the past twelve years and the significance of your papacy in these moments that appear to all to be decisive in the history of humanity.

For twelve years now I have been coming to a knowledge and an ever-growing consciousness of the significance of a very special “call” from the Lord directed to all humanity and especially to us, the consecrated souls in Catholicism.

In 1966, while carrying out my priestly ministry as assistant to Spanish-speaking pilgrims in the Holy Land, I had contact with the person-“instrument” of this “call” from the Lord,

who, according to her own expression, by Will of the Lord was making this call known to me in relation to my vocation in the Holy Land in order that it might be presented to the Church and to the world by the Franciscans. At first I did not give this incident the importance that it has in my conscience today, because of the fact that there are many persons who present themselves as bearers of messages from the Lord which in the end turn out to be mere pious aspirations, many times well-meaning but which are not the truth, nor do they add anything to the message that has been revealed to us by God in Scripture; but in the course of time, through innumerable circumstances – which I can no longer ignore since they form part of a coming-to-consciousness that has been progressively taking place in my religious and human vocation, creating in me a sense of responsibility before God and before the world – I have come to understand, that it is truly a matter of a “call” from God to come to a consciousness of the historical moment we are living.

Your visit to Mexico gives me the opportunity to approach Your Holiness through these lines, because I cannot view with indifference the fact that some people of Mexico acquainted with the “Message” or “call” from the Lord, from there have requested of me a few lines of presentation to accompany the book that they have wished to offer you – one of the books in which, from a certain angle, a view is given with respect to the “Message” mentioned.

Holy Father, I have not wished to bother you simply to present a book to you; rather, in my conscience it has seemed to me that it is an opportunity the Lord offers me to make known to Your Holiness, as official representative of the Catholic Church before God and before the world, this “call” directed to all humanity.

I am at the disposal of Your Holiness at all times for any explanation in this regard. I belong to the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor, am a member of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land for the care of the Holy Places, and presently live in the Franciscan Convent of the Nativity of the Lord in Bethlehem, Israel.

I trust in Your Holiness, hoping for your understanding in this matter which I consider of vital importance for humanity – as it is for me.

With all the esteem and trust that Your Holiness inspires in me, I remain yours in the Lord.

Friar José Barriuso

In the spring of 1979, a clear inner impulse – slowly matured through different but converging paths – moves Father Napoli and Fr. Giuseppe Costantin, without prior agreement, to present their resignations from their positions in order to be able to undertake a form of life more consonant with the common Franciscan ideal.

A written answer to Father Costantin's letter is lacking. The Custos prefers not to present his request to the Discretorium and orally entreats Father Costantin to be patient for yet another year until the 1980 Custodial Chapter, promising him to support his desire at that level.

DOCUMENT 31

TERRA SANCTA HIGH SCHOOL
Jaffa-Tel Aviv, Israel

Jaffa, March 29, 1979

Most Rev. Fr. Maurilio Sacchi
Custos of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

Most Rev. and dear Father Custos,

With this letter, I intend to communicate to you in writing my irrevocable decision, already expressed orally, to renounce

my position as Principal of the Jaffa School for personal reasons of an exclusively spiritual nature already known by you.

This step, meditated at great length, means much more to me than the simple forsaking of a position in which, on a human level, I could in fact be very well off. It is the beginning, I hope, of a new life-experience to which I feel called, and which I see in perfect consonance with the Franciscan ideal to which I have consecrated myself.

I feel that I can no longer put off my decision, which by now has become a vital need. I am sorry that for you this means having to fill the “vacant position” in Jaffa as soon as possible (I beseech you, not later than next April).

As for me, I desire that my case not be submitted to discussion like any other management problem but, rather, that it be considered as a case of conscience that demands respect and understanding, and for which I request your personal support.

With fraternal affection and regard,

Giuseppe Napoli, O.F.M.

DOCUMENT 32

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

May 6, 1979

Dear Father Napoli,

The Discretorium of the Holy Land, after having taken into

consideration the desire expressed in your letter of last March 29th to renounce your position as Principal of our Jaffa School, for personal reasons and in order to be able to dedicate yourself to an experience of a spiritual nature, has expressed its favorable opinion in this regard.

You are requested only to see to it that the School can continue its work without undergoing any hardship, especially for the sake of the students. With my fraternal and affectionate greeting, I send you my best wishes for every good, praying to the Lord that He may illumine and sustain you with His grace.

In the name of our Father Francis,

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

DOCUMENT 33

CONVENT OF THE ANNUNCIATION

Nazareth, Israel

May 7, 1979

Most Rev. Father Custos,

On your way through Nazareth, you asked me to write a memorandum regarding the three young men of Nazareth who have presented a particular request of their own. I take the opportunity to present' to you a double memorandum: one in relation to my personal situation as a Franciscan; the other with respect to the three young men.

MEMORANDUM WITH RESPECT TO MY SITUATION

In two meetings, I have expressed to you my inner situation

of conflict in the community environment in which I live as well as in my position as school principal. I have explained to you my aspirations, which I find more in conformity with the Gospel and our Rule. I precisely stated that Lent of this year was to be a time of reflection for making a decision with respect to my religious life.

During Lent, I have prayed and reflected a good deal and have spoken with persons experienced in the inner life. My encountering the three young men, about whom I am presenting a note, has been for me an awakening signal. The call to a life different from the present one, a life more consonant with the Gospel and with my Franciscan vocation, has become clearer to me. I do not find these aspirations in the environment and in the community in which I have lived for about five years now. I have tried with the support of Father Justo, our Guardian, to promote something that may go beyond the minimum that is usually done for prayer and spiritual sharing. What has been attempted has been received with much passivity.

Outside of the Convent, I do find something of what I need for nourishing my life.

I do not judge the community for which I bear a great respect and esteem because of the good understanding that reigns among us, a sign of the presence of God in our midst.

What I have expressed above is only a part of what I have spoken about more at length in the meetings I have had with you.

I entreat you, therefore, to try to understand my situation and meet with favor my inner aspirations, which I believe come from God. I confidently request that you grant me the possibility of living a new experience of religious life.

It is necessary to find someone to take my place at the school for the school year 1979-80. I will arrange everything in a way that my replacement may have no problems and that things may continue well.

I hope to receive a positive answer to my request because – I repeat what I told you orally – I desire to remain a Franciscan and to live my religious experience here in the Holy Land.

Looking forward to your answer, I greet you fraternally,

Friar G. Costantin

The positive reply to Father Napoli's request left open the problem concerning the concrete form of and the place for the life-experience he intended to undertake. Hence, the following letter in which the request is further spelled out, followed by an initial reply in which the discussion of the problem is postponed to a later date.

DOCUMENT 34

Jaffa, July 16, 1979

Most Rev. Fr. Maurilio Sacchi
Custos of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

Most Reverend Father,

With your letter of May 6, 1979, you informed me, on behalf of the Discretorium of the Holy Land, of the acceptance of my resignation from the position as Principal of the Jaffa school, in order that I might dedicate myself to a spiritual experience perceived by me as a resumption and a deeper living of my original Franciscan vocation.

Orally, I had manifested to you to some extent what this experience consisted in, leaving in suspension the problem of the place for this, to me of altogether secondary importance. With this letter, I mean to express more clearly my thinking for the information of the Discretorium as well.

It is known to you and to all that for some years now I have been in contact, together with other Franciscan confreres, with Señorita Josefina and with various people who have accepted the message received by her and seek to live it in the most complete fidelity to the Will of God.

It is in this that the experience to which I have always referred essentially consists, an experience that at this moment entails my living together with these people and my full participation in their form of life.

Since some of those who live the message are presently residing at the Milk Grotto, the simplest thing for me is to begin this experience in this place.

This is in answer to what you asked me to communicate to you in writing as to what the concrete prospects are that present themselves to me for carrying out the experience for which I have been granted authorization.

Fraternally,

Giuseppe Napoli, O.F.M.

DOCUMENT 35

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

July 18, 1979

Dear Father Napoli,

Your letter of July 16th has been presented to the Discretorium of the Holy Land in the meeting held today.

Since only two of the Discrets have had the possibility of taking a look at your request – before the meeting – the Discretorium has considered it inopportune to have to give an

immediate and formal reply, perhaps a premature one; rather, it considers it logical to think and reflect on it, since it is a matter of a request that presents a good many facets and is susceptible to various consequences.

For this reason, the definitive decision is left for the next meeting.

With fraternal greetings,

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

This letter was motivated by the negative remonstrances made by some new Holy Land Discrets regarding the publication of the work The “New Earth”.

From hearsay, it would appear that the permission to print the work as a publication of the Custody of the Holy Land might have been obtained in a surreptitious manner on the occasion of one of the many times in which Father Angelisanti, the one mainly concerned in the printing of the book, was carrying out his duties as Acting Custos. What is published in the present documentation demonstrates the falsity of this accusation.

DOCUMENT 36

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY

Bethlehem

Bethlehem, July 22, 1979

Most Reverend Father Custos,

My meeting with you, yesterday, forces me to write you this letter in order that everything may emerge clearly in the light of day and something in writing may be left that might provide evidence regarding my personal situation for which I assume complete responsibility.

Since I am unable to find an explanation for certain attitudes, I feel it my duty to remind you of what transpired in the two discretorial sessions of May 28, 1976. Very likely

there is nothing in the official Acts of the Discretorium regarding the discussions held that day during the morning and afternoon sessions. The two enclosed letters serve to reconstruct the problems discussed and the procedures followed for publishing the book *The New Earth*, the publication of which I have personally seen to. I am not including the *reading notes* sent to you and to the Discretorium by Fr. Vittorino Joannes.

It would be well, however, to review all the documentation so that you, together with the Discretorium, may have a complete view of how, in reality, the present state of things has been reached, a state caused by factors absolutely alien to the matter. I don't believe it my duty to make inquisitions of any kind in order to find an explanation for this state of things. I believe that each one should take upon himself his own responsibility with regard to Realities that are binding in conscience.

As to the steps that you with your Discretorium plan to take regarding the book in question, I want you to know one thing above all: I, personally, neither authorize nor advise anything. Regarding all that has been done and has happened as a result of what was discussed in the discretorial meeting of May 28, 1976, I feel calm and serene.

Affectionate greetings,

Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

In July of 1979, an Exposition of the drawings and hooks regarding the Message was opened to the public in two rooms of the Christian Information Centre in Jerusalem, with the consent of the then director, Fr. Ignazio Mancini. The Exposition, centered on the theme of the inner pilgrimage, had the purpose of offering a moment of reflection, especially to pilgrims. For this purpose, the booklet Man's Pilgrimage towards the "New Earth" was also printed in four languages.

The Exposition remained open until April 5, 1981, date on which it had to be closed because of an indirect order given by the new director of the Centre.

The announcement of the opening of the Exposition was made with the following notice, which appeared in the monthly bulletin of the Centre.

DOCUMENT 37

A GRAPHIC EXPOSITION ON MAN'S "EVOLUTION" AND REALIZATION AN EXPOSITION? OR SOMETHING MORE?

During the current year, the Christian Information Centre has presented a double exposition. The first one concerned gospel themes, drawings made by children from the different schools in Jerusalem and surrounding areas; the second disclosed informative documentary material concerning the Holy Shroud of Turin.

Presently, the Centre opens its doors to a set of drawings which, as an expressive means of universal communication,

intend to “make known” and “transmit” a “Message”.

With regard to the most important and significant drawings, a Franciscan theologian of Milan, Fr. Vittorino Joannes, giving his judgment on the book in which they are contained, expresses himself in *this* way:

“The iconography, intimately linked to the written work, is a fundamental element of the work: It characterizes it and at the same time renders it sister to other great expressions of this literary genre. Consider, for example, how the thought of a John of the Cross, Theresa of Avila, Angelus Silesius is born, and even the sketches of Teilhard de Chardin, at first derided and today considered of inestimable value.

The phenomenon of an intuitive mind that becomes expressed above all in an iconic expression is today considered of enormous creative value. Strangely enough, this is due precisely to the acquisitions of the most correct psychoanalysis, or better still, to ‘depth psychology’. Today there are even university professorships that deal with this phenomenon and study it as a fact of fundamental importance. Now then, I have read the whole work with the guidance of each one of the drawings; I have then discussed them with a professor of religious psychology at the Catholic University of Milan, who was impressed by the linearity or coherence, by the accuracy, and by the ideal richness that unfolds little by little in this iconography. To my precise question as to whether in his diligent viewing of the drawings he detected any element of disturbance or psychological distortion (with the guidance of the Rorschach plates), he has to the contrary stated that he perceives a clear-cut strength of visual and ideal conceptualization typical of pronounced minds and sensibilities. His astonishment increased when I told him that the author has had no specific higher learning, neither iconographical nor

metaphysical nor religious. On this point I have wanted, out of professional honesty and duty, to ask for the help of a specialist on the subject. From a theological viewpoint, the iconography is foundational for the understanding of the work.”

The aim of the exposition is neither cultural nor artistic, but simply religious and spiritual – aim intimately connected to the fact that the Holy Land is a place for summoning to the faith, to that faith which can be rediscovered and revived by the pilgrimage, of which the drawings offer us a profound theology.

How did the Earth in its most profound Reality form? Did it form according to God’s eternal designs? How did the “germ of life” from which the evolution of “Mother Earth” had its beginning – “evolution” that will yield the “Fruit” wanted by God – come to manifest itself?

“Through faith we perceive that the worlds were created by the word of God, and that what is visible came into being through the invisible” (Heb 11:3). “...He has spoken to us through his Son, whom he has made heir of all things and through whom he first created the universe. This Son is the reflection of the Father’s glory, the exact representation of the Father’s being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word... “ (Heb 1:2-3).

The drawings as a whole present a double moment: the moment of the divine Reality who manifests Himself in Himself and only with Himself, and the moment of His Living Image, the Only Begotten – first outside of time and space, then in time and space.

In Eternity: the Only Begotten, Christ, “Living Image” and “good pleasure” of the Father, through whom, with whom,

and in whom everything has been made; the non-visible Creation, the angels “created” in the “likeness” of the Holy Spirit for collaborating in the Work of God and for serving the Son; the souls, “image” of the Son, who with Him, moved by the Spirit of God, come to be “younger brothers” of God’s “Firstborn”, begotten in Him for the “praise of His glory”; the awaited Fruit, the “consummated Unity”, God in all, the “New Jerusalem”, “the Tabernacle of God among men”.

In Time: the visible creation, as a passing “figure”, as “shadow” of the non-visible eternal Creation, but which is the gestating womb that will give birth, as manifestation, to the Reality-God. Fecundating “Germ Cell” of this gestation of Mother Earth is the “Man”, the supernatural Man who, moved by the Will of God, triggers the birth of what we call “Mystical Body”, formed of “bodies, souls, and spirits”.

Here is the World that, with more or less consciousness, we yearn for and towards which we journey as pilgrims on the “way of return”, the only World wanted by the Heart of God. Christ Jesus, our elder brother, with his Birth, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension has opened and lived this Way, and has also consummated in Himself the Work of God on Earth: “*All has been accomplished*”; what is missing is that which corresponds to the liberty of the creature. Each soul who attains to this Unity consummated in Christ is like a partial revelation of the “Mystical Body” of the “Total Man”, “Body” which will be complete when all the souls have identified themselves with the Only Begotten.

“The angel carried me away in spirit to the top of a very high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God” (Apoc 21:10).

The Exposition has been set up in the Centre precisely

because of its ecumenical nature. In order to appreciate and understand it, openness of spirit and reflection are required.

Personal Reflections

"...inner pilgrimage" (p. 196)

When the Message speaks of being a pilgrim of the Will of God, it is not referring particularly to the changes that are to take place in the external life of everyone who decides to surrender himself totally, unconditionally, and directly to the Being who Is. It is not solely a question of a decision that gets us to break with the outer world, but it is, more than anything else, an inner pilgrimage. The latter is meant to indicate the search within ourselves: to be alert to the I-ego in all its manifestations, constantly heeding the voice of conscience, and thus to gradually unearth the innermost layers of our interiority until we get to the deepest and most revealing strata of our reality. This inner pilgrimage, upon leading us to the regions of the ultimate realities, reveals to us, finally, that the Being is our only and true essence. When we arrive at this culminating moment of the inner pilgrimage, we have fulfilled the call of Jesus Christ to deny ourselves. In short, the pilgrimage is this ongoing process of self-denial in the hustle and bustle of our daily life until we get to the final state of the enlightened consciousness of the nothingness that we are.

In August of 1979, during their triennial vacations in their native country, Father Angelisanti and Father Napoli request and obtain a meeting with the General of the Order, Fr. John Vaughn, to whom they disclose the spiritual experience they were living in contact with the persons staying at the Milk Grotto, and they offer him a copy of the work The “New Earth”, published under the care of Father Angelisanti himself, and other writings concerning the Message. In the same month Father Angelisanti has a copy of The “New Earth” delivered to the Holy Father, accompanied by the following letter.

DOCUMENT 38

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY
Bethlehem

Bethlehem, August 29, 1979

Holiness,

Permit me to write you in a spontaneous and natural manner. Only in this way will I be able to express what I feel springing forth from the depths of my being.

What I am about to say to you is not fruit of long and complicated reasonings; it is the simple manifestation of a reality that with time has gradually become present to my conscience as a Christian and a follower of Francis of Assisi.

Through reading and meditating on the book “The ‘New

Earth' of the 'new man'," the publication of which I have taken charge, I have discovered and encountered Someone who, I hope, will transform my life. I am convinced that the contents of the book concern Your Holiness, both as a person and as Vicar of Christ.

I believe it to be God's Will that Your Holiness *personally* come to know the living doctrine of the book for, otherwise, the voice of the Spirit present in it could, through another channel, reach you in a modified, attenuated way, if not altered or distorted.

It is a matter of a "Gift" that the Lord has granted to the Franciscans of the Holy Land so that they, after seven centuries of custodianship of the Holy Places, may communicate to the world the genuine message of the Gospel.

Before offering it to anyone else, I feel it my duty to offer to you, Holiness, such a gift, so that you might meditate on it with serenity and openness of mind and heart with the sole purpose of grasping, through the "drawings" and their respective "explanations", what is already going on in the unfolding of the "History of Salvation".

I believe that the book is the greatest act of love the Lord is doing for us men of the twentieth century, men thirsty for science and learning. It is a matter of a learning as ancient as Adamic man, that is, man created "in the image and likeness of God". It is a genuine learning, primordial, and stripped of the superstructures with which human reason has "clothed" it, complicating it and thus rendering it hardly accessible or recognizable to the children of God. Collectively, man has arrived at the point of no longer recognizing the Father and His Word who has manifested Himself through the Virgin Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation.

Holiness, may you read the book *personally*, even if it might mean a great sacrifice for you. It is with the sacrifice and offering of Himself that Jesus of Nazareth has redeemed us. Do not let the terms and expressions used trouble you. Try to avoid any attempt to relate what is affirmed to old or modern philosophical or theological systems or to hermeneutical exigencies of Biblical exegesis. Let yourself be interiorly illumined by the realities expressed in the drawings and explanations. In the reading, try to proceed slowly, allowing for long moments of inner silence. The Spirit, availing Himself of such simple and ordinary human means, has wished to express and communicate to us that which the man of today anxiously longs to learn and know in order to be able to live it.

Consider me as a son who, having discovered the greatest treasure of his life, cannot refrain from offering it to his “Father”, so that he may place it at the disposal of all his other “children”. I ask your blessing.

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

On September 8, 1979, during the meeting held in Jerusalem by the Father General, John Vaughn, with all the Franciscan religious of Judea, Father Barriuso calls the Father General's attention to the spiritual Reality that is taking place in the Holy Land, asking him to inform himself further; and he hands him, as well as the Vicar General, Fr. Onorio Pontoglio, the booklet Man's Pilgrimage towards the "New Earth", which reproduces the drawings of the Exposition and presents a brief synthesis of their Message.

Father Napoli's request, presented in the letter of July 16, 1979 (cf. doc. 34, p. 191), was discussed in the Discretorium. The Custos, Father Sacchi, communicated to him a personal proposal of his, about which he had also spoken with the Father General during his visit to the Holy Land.

DOCUMENT 39

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

September 18, 1979

Dear Father Napoli,

I would like to apologize if I am late in answering you, but I believe you will understand how busy I have been, especially because of the visit to the Custody of the Most Rev. Father General, whom I have personally escorted on a tour of all our houses and works, even outside of Israel.

Regarding your position – after having also spoken about it with the Father General – I can, for the moment, propose this solution which I will definitively communicate to you later on after I have presented it to the Discretorium of the Holy Land.

You could be assigned to the family in Bethlehem (or some other place of your preference), disposed, of course, to lend those services that are normal for anyone who forms part of a given community.

Nevertheless, not having a specific assignment, you will undoubtedly have the free time necessary for dedicating yourself to a spiritual experience.

I believe this may be the best and most acceptable solution. At any rate, I will write you next week in this regard. I hope that your vacation has been beneficial to you and that your sister's situation has improved.

I wish you all the best and assure you that I remember you before me Lord. Fraternally,

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

The following letter from Señorita Josefina to the Custos and Discrets accompanies a "Message" received in Bethlehem at the Milk Grotto on August 17, 1979.

DOCUMENT 40

Bethlehem, September 20, 1979

Rev. Father Custos and Rev. Discrets
of the Custody of the Holy Places of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

As you know, for more than five years now, I have been residing in the house of the Milk Grotto with a group of people dedicated to living the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, as He lived it, according to God's Will. We are very grateful to you for having given us this opportunity to carry out what in conscience has been for me and for the persons who accompany me the Will of God, and we hope to continue this life at this place until the Lord arranges things differently.

Because of the fact that on the 17th of last month I received a Message from the Lord, a copy of which I enclose herein with its Italian translation, and the fact that on the 8th of this month I received from Him the order to transmit it to the world from here (the Holy Land), given the importance of the meaning that this Message has for Humanity "today", I feel in conscience the necessity to make it known to you directly.

Yours truly,

the slave of the lord

DRAW NEAR, MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN, EVEN INFANTS AT THE BREAST, AND LISTEN; HEAR, ALL YOU PEOPLES AND NATIONS; LET THE EARTH LISTEN AND ALL WHO FILL IT, THE WORLD AND ALL THAT EXISTS IN IT; BECAUSE MY LORD SAYS THIS FOR ALL, AND HE SAYS IT "*TODAY*", IN YOUR DAYS.

As the Bridegroom is, so is the Bride. But men have identified "the Bride" with the works of their reasonings, impelled by the "prince of this world" who has nothing in me, and therefore, as a consequence, they have identified me with the Sanhedrin, work of the same Leviathan: an association of men directed by the spirit of the world and oriented towards the attainment of the interests of the world; the Sanhedrin represented the "interpretation" of the Law, but it was not "Israel". By identifying "the Bride" with an Institution, which is work of the men impelled by the spirit of the world, they have identified me with the Sanhedrin because "the Bridegroom" cannot be different from "the Bride". In this way the "men of this age" have placed themselves at the side of the one who, being dead, still acts as if he were alive, because they, the "men of this age", rejecting the Life have chosen death. When I, fulfillment of the Law, had not yet come, the men who formed "the Sanhedrin", the institution, were not responsible for what they were representing, and this is why I manifested myself in their midst, explaining to them passages of Scripture that were announcing the time of my coming, in order that they would recognize that "the An-

nounced One” was already before them; but their eyes were blinded and their ears were dulled by their attraction to the interests of the “prince of this world” and they could not “see” or “hear” the “good news” I was bringing them. I opened the eyes of the blind from birth and gave hearing to those deaf to sound, I made the mute speak and I raised the dead so that seeing my works they would recognize through them the Father who sent me: “the Sent One” whom their God, my Father, had announced and who was written about in the Law, of which they were the guardians. And later on, they, who at that time were Sadducees, before the evidence of the presence of my Spirit in those who had received me, hardened their hearts, forbidding them to preach in my name, because the very fact that the One whom they believed dead was ALIVE, this declared the death of the Sanhedrin, who represented the “interpretation” of the Law. The Sanhedrin died because of the inefficacy of the “interpretation” of the Law, since the death (self-denial) of “one” had made possible in many that which the Law, as knowledge of good and evil, was unable to accomplish in anyone: that man would obey *definitively* the “Creator” rather than the creature, affirming the liberty in the Will, “to obey God rather than men”; thus, as through “one” (in Adam) came “the disobedience” because of the obedience to the creature in *opposition* to God, putting the separation between God and man, also through this Unique One (in Jesus) came the *definitive* obedience to God, affirmation of the liberty in the Will, eliminating in this way the separation between God and man, separation caused by the disobedience to what God had commanded him: “... *but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat*”.

As the Bridegroom is, so is the Bride. The Bridegroom is “the Man” (the one in whom the Divine has manifested Itself)

in whom all are “One” and this one as “son of man” (born of a human being) suffered for the offenses of all and was counted as one more man among men. I was “*a man*” among men, not an “*association of men*” among other men. When I chose by Will of my Father those who were to receive and announce my name, “the Man”, “the man” among men, I called them one by one, I did not choose an institution of men among the organized groups, which existed then as they exist now.

The Bride is not different from the Bridegroom: they are two moments of a “Unique One”, unique one who is at the same time many, but many who attain the Unity in “one”.

As the Bridegroom came, so comes the Bride, and as crucified bridegroom, dead to himself, I marry by crucifying, through the denial and death to self. This cross of your “marriage”, which is your personal Redemption, is not a material cross. Other men were crucified physically before me, with me and after me, but they did not obtain the Redemption and many not even the redemption of their own offenses when the Redemption was realized, because they had not denied themselves. Nevertheless, the material cross had its significance: a tree was used by the angel to introduce “the Sin” into the Human Nature, “the man” (Adam), tempting him to disobedience, to obey the creature (the angel) in *opposition* to God; and on a tree, the wood of the cross, men were judged until, out of obedience to God, “the man”, the Unique One, carried in his body “the Sin” unto death and death on a cross: through the *disobedience* “the Sin” entered “the man” (the Human Nature) and through the *obedience* “the man” definitively conquered “the Sin”, affirming the Liberty in the Will. Obedience to God above all things is the first and ultimate commandment. I came TO DO THE WILL

OF MY FATHER AND TO BRING TO FULFILLMENT HIS WORK: this is the Law, the Prophets and the Apostles; this is ISRAEL, this is the CHURCH, this is the MESSIAH, “the Expected One” of all times.

As you see, obedience to God above all things crucifies “the Sin”. Crucifying “the Sin” in each one, by means of the denial of self, brings about the “marriage” of God, the Divine, with the souls, the human: death and Life!

There is no obedience to God without the denial of one’s self. The *affirmation* of one’s self is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

Man’s sin has been the *orientation* to himself, and from this sin, the Human Nature, “the Man”, has been redeemed through the obedience of One: “*If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me*”.

You will be able to see the Bridegroom in your days if you see the Bride, “*You are the son of the living God*”, and then you will enjoy the same “Promise” that Peter, Abraham and Adam received.

Follow me... each one in the denial of himself, if you want to affirm your liberty in the Will. I have come to fulfill the Will of my Father and to bring to fulfillment His Work. The Work is my Father’s and it is I who bring it to fulfillment. I am at the door and I myself am the door, and you cannot enter if you have not first denied yourselves in order to be – in the Bride – myself. In this sense you are my Body and you are my Church, “One”, in the Bride, who is myself, and in me you are One in my Father. My Father and I are one and the same thing.

My children, in conclusion: the Unity, Divine Nature, is in

you, but you cannot realize yourselves in It if you are not in the Unique One, “the Man”, the Human Nature.

the slave of the Lord

Message received from the Lord in Bethlehem, Holy Land, on the 17th of August, 1979. The order to transmit it to the world was received on the 8th of September, 1979, 12:00 a.m.²

² On the same day that the order was received from the Lord to make this Message public to the world, the text of the Message was sent to the Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post*, which did not publish it because it was not accepted by the censor. It was subsequently published by the following daily newspapers: *El Tempo* of Rome, *El Nacional* and *El Universal* of Caracas, Venezuela, and *Excelsior* of Mexico City.

Personal Reflections

“Draw near, men, women and children, even infants at the breast, and listen; hear, all you peoples and nations; let the earth listen and all who fill it, the world and all that exists in it; because my Lord says this for all, and He says it ‘TODAY’, in your days” (p.207).

The Message is fully contemporary; it is the Truth for our days. When it says “*your days*”, it refers not only to the historical setting, but means to encompass all that exists. “*TODAY*” is the consummation of all times, a time that has its origin in the unfolding of the Eternal. What we are being told here is for men, women, and children; for all the peoples of the earth, for the earth itself, for the entire world and all that exists in it. We persist in pointing out that this Message, although springing up in a Christian milieu, is truly for all men without distinctions of race or geography; it is for children, adolescents, young adults, the middle-aged, the elderly; for men and women.

“As the Bridegroom is, so is the Bride” (p.207).

The Bridegroom is Jesus Christ. *Christ* represents a state: the activity of the Divine in man; this happens in the human being who denies himself and places himself entirely, unconditionally, and directly in the hands of the Will of the Father, as happened in Jesus of Nazareth. Every human being after Jesus Christ who makes a similar surrender is Church and Bride. “The Bride”, “the Church”, is the Unity that represents the totality of the souls who, after the example of

Jesus, carry to completion their total surrender to the Father.

“But men have identified ‘the Bride’ with the works of their reasonings, impelled by the ‘prince of this world’ who has nothing in me, and therefore, as a consequence, they have identified me with the Sanhedrin” (p.207).

The men who came after Jesus Christ – instead of radically undertaking the way of self-denial without making any compromises with that which does not come from the Father – tried to establish a bridge of convenience between the Being and the world. The human entity took delight in the works of his reasonings. He regarded the institutions as man’s legitimate house; and so, in this way, he identified himself with the “prince of this world”. Satan is the hidden enemy of man on his path to Redemption. This presence of the rebellious angel – the pride in man’s life – appeared at the very moment in which the divine nature unveiled itself in the first man. From the very moment in which Adam oriented himself toward the creature, forgetting his Creator, from that instant, the reins of man were taken over by the angel, the creature. Jesus Christ, unlike Adam, represents the first man who liberates himself from satanic power and consecrates his entire life to the unrestricted service of the Father. There is nothing in common between Christ and Satan, between Love and Power, between obedience to the Being and obedience to the institution. To say that the Bride identified herself with the Institution expresses the unconsciousness of man after Jesus Christ, inasmuch as man has completely strayed from the path that should lead him to the Father’s house. This false bride is represented by institutionalized Christianity. Now then, *“the ‘Bridegroom’ cannot be different from the ‘Bride’”*, that is to say, to identify the Bride, the Church, with the Institution, was simultaneously to institutionalize Jesus Christ, the Bride-

groom, identifying Him with the Sanhedrin. This institutionalization is the greatest conspiracy against the Truth. If we approach Jesus Christ through any institution we are only devitalizing His Message, denying His Gospel.

Today, at this late stage in time, it is most urgent and imperative to rescue Jesus Christ from the clutches of the institutions, be it from the Roman Catholic Institution or the other Christian institutions, which using His name and doctrine have contributed more than any other institution to man's going astray. It is urgent and imperative that we, the men of today, realize that the institution, whichever it may be, is the hindrance in our search for the house of the Being: *"In this way the 'men of this age' have placed themselves at the side of the one who, being dead, still acts as if he were alive, because they, the 'men of this age', rejecting the Life have chosen death."*

According to the Message, the "men of this age" are those human beings who have already evolved in their human nature but find themselves in a state of errancy, unconscious of the Divine Reality (the Being they carry in themselves), for not having cooperated with the exigencies of the Divine: the denial of themselves in order to give preeminence to the Being. These human beings have placed themselves on the side of the purely material man, the man detained in his I. This kind of man, detained in his I, is the "old man" who was crucified, put to death in Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, this kind of man is dead; this is why it is said that they have placed themselves on the side of the one who, being dead, still acts as if he were alive. The men of this world, rejecting the life obtained through the death of Jesus – identification with the Divine, the Being – have chosen death, identifying themselves with the human, the *I*, and even more so, identify-

ing themselves with a dead institution that claims to base itself on the Divine in order to make others believe that it lives.

The human being has the possibility of identifying himself with the Being. His essence is rooted in this possibility. It is there where he can find the ultimate answers to his existence; it is there where he can reach fullness, where he can really experience the state of completeness: only the Being can give us the experience of the state of perfection, that state in which we need nothing more in order to live and experience ourselves as complete. And nevertheless, the fact is that we have been taught death instead of Life. Satan holds sway in the institutions and from there he directs man's going astray.

Before the coming of Jesus Christ, Satan operated in the shadows, and it seemed as if man himself was the maker of his own life. Yet, after Jesus Christ identifies the Evil One, concealed in human judgments, as the deceiver par excellence, what ought to have come about was the complete rejection of this human judgment based on the "ego", the satanic in our lives: "... *because you are not judging by God's standards but by man's*", but lamentably it did not happen this way. And Satan holds sway today with greater force and power than ever before. Hence, it is urgent and imperative for the man of today to unmask Satan and the instrument he uses to subjugate man. "*Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block for me, because you are not judging by God's standards but by man's*" (Mt 16:23).

What is happening today with the Message is the same as what happened when Jesus Christ announced the Gospel in His epoch. The institutions of that time felt threatened by the Good News, and that is why they sought by every means to extinguish this threat. In spite of the fact that Jesus was basing

his Good News on passages of the Old Testament, even so, they did not believe him. Likewise today, even though the Message holds to the necessity for *living* the pure Gospel, the truth is that the institutions who say they represent the Gospel have remained blind and deaf in the presence of this new call. It is of primary importance to bring out that the Gospel is not just for talking about it, but first of all for living, for being it. From this perspective it becomes evident that the institutions who represent Christianity speak and proclaim to the four winds the word of Jesus Christ, but the fact is that they are eight thousand leagues away from fulfilling it.

There is a basic falseness in these institutions and it is urgent and imperative to unmask them, to bring out in broad daylight the fact that they no longer represent Christ. The poor reception that Jesus Christ and his Gospel have in the man of today is due to the fact that his alleged legitimate representatives are false, hypocritical. And somehow this falseness and hypocrisy have had repercussions in the eyes of everyone else, discrediting Jesus Christ and His Gospel. This alleged bride of Jesus Christ – the ecclesiastical institutions who say they represent him – are unfaithful, adulterous brides. Hence, it is urgent and imperative to legalize a divorce that has already been consummated in deeds. *A Case of Conscience*, the departure from the Institution by the three friars, represents the coming-to-consciousness of the Bride; this coming-to-consciousness will have to take place in all the living cells that are still prisoners, under bondage to *the great harlot*. Definitively, at this late stage in time, Jesus Christ and His Gospel can no longer be represented by any institution.

“The Sanhedrin died because of the inefficacy of the ‘interpretation’ of the Law, since the death (self-denial) of ‘one’ had made possible in many that which the Law, as

knowledge of good and evil, was unable to accomplish in anyone: that man would obey definitively the 'Creator' rather than the creature, affirming the liberty in the Will, 'to obey God rather than men' " (p.208).

The imposture of the Sanhedrin comes from man's identification with one interpretation – official – of the Law in order to carry out his life. The Law was the highest tribunal of the Truth: all the actions of man's life were, in the last instance, being ruled by the Law. As we know, the Mosaic Law was of Divine origin; therefore, Law and Truth were one and the same thing.

When Jesus Christ appears with his Good News before the Jews of his time, they were still identified with their *interpretation* of the Mosaic Law; the Sanhedrin believed itself to be the faithful interpreter of this Law. They were not conscious of the fact that they were only offering one interpretation of the Law. The Law is interpreted according to the level of consciousness of the one who imposes it and of the one who does not comply with it. This means that in the interpretations of the Law, what prevails is the spirit of the world, the interests of convenience. Now then, in the face of all these possible "interpretations" of the Law, Jesus of Nazareth brought the only valid interpretation: "to fulfill the Will of the Father"; he who fulfills the Will of God fulfills the whole Law. Jesus is condemned to death and crucified according to the official interpretation of the Law, having been accused of being a transgressor of the Law; thus Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin, and nevertheless, he is resurrected by the Author of the Law. This signified the death of the Sanhedrin and of all absolutized human interpretations, their definitive disqualification

"The Bride is not different from the Bridegroom: they are

two moments of a 'Unique One', unique one who is at the same time many, but many who reach the Unity in 'one'" (p.208).

The Bride cannot be different from the Bridegroom; if the Bridegroom died to himself, denied himself through his unconditional surrender to the Father, so also in the Bride a crucifying death to all the interests and manifestations of the ego must take place. This Wedding between the Bridegroom and the Bride represents the end of man's evolution in the human and the beginning of his entrance into the "New Earth".

"Obedience to God above all things is the first and ultimate commandment. I came TO DO THE WILL OF MY FATHER AND TO BRING TO FULFILLMENT HIS WORK" (p.209).

The total, unconditional, and direct surrender to the Being above all else is the first and ultimate commandment. The Law, therefore, is not for guaranteeing or protecting any vested interest, whether it be in regard to tradition, native land, family, private property. Obedience to the Will annuls all interpretations of the Law that are the fruit of convenience. Through obedience to the Will, the human is transcended.

Father Napoli's request is discussed in the Discretorium toward the end of September, before his return from vacation. In the letter that follows, the discretorial decision is disclosed.

DOCUMENT 41

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

September 26, 1979

My dear Father Napoli,

Yesterday, September 25, 1979, we talked about your request in the Discretorium.

Though your sentiments and aspirations have been taken into consideration, the Discretorium of the Holy Land has striven to clarify all aspects of the problem from the theoretical as well as the practical viewpoint.

For several reasons – which the Discretorium deems valid and which, therefore, precisely for the sake of “Conscience” it cannot and must not disregard – it excludes your being assigned to the Milk Grotto as well as to the Bethlehem convent.

The Discretorium, rather, would be of the opinion that you remain in Italy – at least until the next Chapter – where, in Mount Alvernia or in any Franciscan shrine of Assisi or in another place of your preference, you would have time and opportunity to pray, meditate, and make a decision with

respect to your future.

If, instead, you would prefer to return to the Holy Land, the Discretorium will see to assigning you to the convent it will deem most suitable, where you, like all your other confreres, will have to lend your services, yet having the leeway to dedicate yourself to your spiritual experience.

This conclusion was reached by keeping in mind some principles and also some ideas envisaged by the Father General himself, which I summarize for you:

– The Friar Minor, if he truly wishes to be such, must conform to his Rule, follow according to the Constitutions the common life of the others and with the others, adhering to the directives of the Superiors.

– The will of God manifests itself also through the Superiors; actually, it is known that God’s will always passes through human mediations, however complex and mysterious these may be. This mediation is necessary in order to test the sacrificial nature of obedience.

– Normally, the discerning of God’s will should be done in the context of fraternal relations, and not subjectively.

– The true charism of inspiration – even though authentic – can never be in contrast with the exercise of evangelical authority: this, too, is a charism!

– The Franciscan Order has its own charism; whoever wishes to live it wholly can do so even while remaining in the convent or, at least, within the bounds of the institution, without having to look for it outside or in other forms.

– The superiors, too, have the duty to act in “conscience”, keeping in mind the individuals and the whole Fraternity.

– I add that Cardinal Ballestrero, speaking at the Confer-

ence of the Major Superiors of Italy with regard to groups with a charism different from the specific charism of one's own Order or Institute, said: *"The different religious vocations, most of the time, are not capable of being wedded to movements with strongly defined characteristics and tending to individualize on their own; this is why these experiences can turn out to be divagating or even alienating"*. Dear Father Napoli, as you see, it is not a matter of decisions that the Discretorium has rashly or heedlessly made. It has pondered, reflected and, not yet having a clear view of the situation in its fullness, has given the answer that it honestly and with conviction believes it must in "conscience" give.

I would like you to take all this with good spirit and to also understand our situation and responsibility. If you have "your" problem, the Discretorium is receptive to it, but it still has to take into account precisely its own responsibilities, which are made more burdensome by the fact that in its practical decisions, it must take into account the ensemble of persons and things.

See that you do things calmly and with much spirit of acceptance. We await your reply in this regard.

I greet you fraternally, wishing you all the best in the Lord before whom I will remember you in a special way, hoping you will do likewise for me.

In Christ our Lord,

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

Father Napoli's Note

The “wise” reply of the Discretorium, which seems to anticipate the times, is rather disproportionate to my request of that moment and has in reality something in the background not clearly expressed, which appears, among other things, also from the fact that even the solution envisaged by the Custos has been discarded. The principles adduced, moreover, are not so much an answer to my case as the taking of a clear-cut stand against the marvelous spiritual reality born, as a gift of God, at the Milk Grotto, from which, at that time and thereafter, I have been intentionally kept away. The same reality will later on be the fundamental motive for the rejection of the joint petition presented to the Capitular Congress of 1980. What is missing, here and elsewhere, is the concrete evidence that would justify such an attitude.

As far as I'm concerned, what I was asking for at that moment was not to go beyond the institution, but only to carry out an experience in a house of the Custody, the Milk Grotto, even though in the company of persons not belonging to the Franciscan institution, but certainly genuine followers of the “revelation” received by Francis, that of “living the Gospel”. Mark well the fact that the person responsible for the Milk Grotto and the adjoining House, even after the discretorial authorization granted to the Group, has always continued to be a Franciscan religious of the Bethlehem community.

My request was not born all of a sudden. It had its roots in an old aspiration never disowned – that of living in reality my vocation of total consecration to God according to what I had glimpsed and desired in the dawn of my youth and intellectu-

ally delved deeply into all my life, with the bitter regret of never having been able to put it into practice, partly through my own fault and partly through the fault of the reality in which I was inserted.

The encounter with the Message – as doctrine that flowed forth limpid, luminous, and gratuitous like water from a spring, and as lived life that embodied all my ideals, by now considered unattainable – had the power to bring me back to faith, a genuine faith, the faith that believes in the impossible because it has “seen” the Spirit of God in action. All at once, the best of what I had learned and of what I thought I had assimilated in my studies of theology, of philosophy, of Islamic mysticism, ceased to appear to me like a beautiful ideal, fruit of the authors’ dreams or literary capacities, and became a life lived before my unbelieving eyes, a concrete and palpable reality. All at once I “understood”, but with my whole being, the truth of Plato’s “myth of the cave”: it is necessary that someone turn us in the opposite direction so that we may begin to see the reality without confusing it anymore with the shadow or the image. All at once I realized that I had never truly believed in Christ’s absurd message: it is necessary to die to one’s self in order to find Life. All at once I found myself again before the tremendous present-day relevance of St. Francis of Assisi and of his most personal and not-understood path. I felt a rekindling within my breast of an ancient and dormant enthusiasm, as if before the only state of life of which I would not be ashamed – the only way to hush my conscience which screamed against the inauthenticity of my whole being. I knew that I did not have the strength to carry forward such a thing alone, but I also knew that this is a grace and that God was offering it to me in that moment. I realized that what I had received, no one

could any longer take away from me. Fortunately, it was in line with what I had always chosen. I did not have to disavow anything essential; on the contrary, it seemed to me that only then I really began to understand the Gospel and St. Francis.

Two years earlier, I had already manifested my emerging spiritual aspirations, first in the joint letter of August 29, 1977 (cf. doc. 16, p.134), and later more explicitly in several private conversations with the Father Custos, but my vocation at that time was not yet clear and mature; I preferred, therefore, to yield to the insistence of the Custos who was proposing my transfer to Jaffa. But now the moment of grace had arrived for me. I could not let it pass without running the risk of being left, from then on, without the strength for “taking the leap”. On the other hand, I saw nothing concrete in which I could embody what for me was by now a vital need. The ideal thing, as I used to repeat to the Father Custos, would have been that something might be born among us Franciscans. For the moment, I saw no other possibility than the one the Lord was offering me: the possibility of drawing close to the group of persons, the meeting with whom – stirring and unsettling – had all the signs of a clear invitation from Providence: the possibility of sharing their poverty, their discomforts and, above all, their unconditional surrender to the Will of God, whose unfathomable exigencies I was not grasping at the time.

The two letters (cf. docs. 31, p. 187 and 34, p. 191) in which my request is expressed were intentionally directed only to the Father Custos, just as it was to him alone that I had orally manifested the inner state that underlay it, asking him to become the interpreter of my inner state for the Discretorium if this really became indispensable – all in the “naive” desire that a delicate question of conscience and

faith might not be submitted to “public” discussion, to decisions by a majority, and to reasons of convenience, the same as any other management or administrative question. This perhaps explains the tone of the Discretorium’s reply and the total distortion of the situation, even to the astonishing proposal that I “remain in Italy in order to reflect about my future”, as if I had already abandoned the Custody and were not, instead, simply on vacation at the side of my suffering sister.

To the letter that disclosed the decision of the Discretorium, no answer was given because of the unexpected, most important joint decision made in the meantime together with three other confreres, of which the letter of October 30, 1979 (cf. doc. 42, p.224) speaks – a decision that brought about the realization of my indefinite desire for that something that should have been born in the bosom of us Franciscans. Now matters were taking another turn and a much more profound meaning.

The letter that follows is the terminal point of a long and slow process of an inner maturing and the necessary point of reference for subsequent letters to the father Visitor and to the Discretorium, which are a resumption and an explanation of it.

It is in this moment that we have for the first time, all together and in a clear and concrete way, perceived that which we dare to designate as a special joint “call” from the Lord. The letter, though at this moment appearing to be a “petition” to the authority, is already on our part – as to what is essential – a decision. It manifests our yes to the invitation received with the acceptance beforehand of all the consequences. Nevertheless, we have considered it just – and this also in conscience – to first exhaust all the possibilities at our disposal so that the Superiors might recognize and accept our vocation, at least on the basis of respect for conscience, convinced that such an acceptance would have had a great significance.

DOCUMENT 42

October 30, 1979

Most Rev. Father Maurilio Sacchi
Custos of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

Most Reverend Father,

At various times, either orally or in writing, individually or all together, we have addressed you in order to manifest our most profound aspirations or to communicate our experiences of a spiritual nature which have appeared to us as so many invitations from the Lord.

A combination of internal and external circumstances has led to a maturing in us of some fundamental convictions and makes us converge in a well-defined petition which to us seems to be what the Lord wants of us at this time.

The following passage of the Gospel can express, as perhaps no other, our situation and that to which we feel called: *«The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field; he who finds it hides it, and in his joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field»* (Mt 13:44).

The treasure we have found is not anything new but the rediscovery of a reality that lies more or less dormant in every man, and of which we had caught a glimpse – perhaps in image – at the time when our early vocation to the evangelical and Franciscan ideal blossomed, and which gave us the strength to leave everything in a sincere act of faith in the One

who was calling us. It is a going deeper into the same vocation with greater awareness and greater impetus because the glimpsed treasure is by now almost within easy reach.

For some of us, as is known to all, the immediate stimulus for this coming-to-consciousness has been our encounter with a person whom the Lord has sent us – we are convinced of it – and who has transmitted to us a message of life that has profoundly stirred our conscience about the realities of the Spirit, confirming us in our original and genuine Franciscan vocation, and making us ever more sensitive to the inner voice of the Shepherd and Father who leads us along His ways which are not man's ways.

Until now, we have benefitted from the experiences of others through more or less continuous contacts and in a more or less intense manner, according to the circumstances in which each one of us has found himself, with the people who for approximately five years have been staying at the Milk Grotto, people who, even without officially professing a religious life, live the evangelical Franciscan ideal (cf. Mt 6:25-34) completely dedicated to the Will of the Lord.

Today a new and unpredictable situation presents itself to us which bears for us the full weight of an intervention by the Lord that imposes upon us in conscience a personal decision: Señorita Josefina has communicated to us that on the 26th of the present month of October, she “received from the Lord” the order to leave the House at the Milk Grotto.

Taking into account all the circumstances that have preceded this fact, we see in this order of the Lord's an explicit and concrete invitation for us to continue – by ourselves, at this same place, with the necessary liberty – the experience begun from the outside and with these persons, assuming all

the consequences of insecurity that this decision of ours entails.

We request, therefore, that we may live at the Milk Grotto as soon as the persons who presently reside there have left, so that the Lord may carry forward what He Himself has initiated, granting it to us as a gift.

We insist on repeating what we have many times expressed by word of mouth, and that is, that what has been recently discovered by us – each one in his own way and at his own level – is only a conscious and personal rediscovery of the ideal of St. Francis to which we intend to remain perfectly faithful, and it is in this sense that we desire to carry out this experience, surrendering ourselves to the Will of God, even as to our sustenance.

In the certainty that this petition of ours, expression of an exigency of fidelity to the Will of the Lord to which we have all consecrated ourselves, will find your paternal understanding and support, we greet you affectionately.

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti
José Barriuso
Friar Giuseppe Napoli
Friar G. Costantin

Personal Reflections

“The treasure we have found is not anything new but the rediscovery of a reality that lies more or less dormant in every man” (p. 224).

“Rediscovery”: the Message represented for the friars the rediscovery of the Gospel and of the Message of Francis. As is known, the Gospel as well as the Message of Francis were considered the essential foundation of the religious institutions that have represented them. In these institutions, the Spirit contained in the word of Jesus Christ has, through the centuries, grown weaker and weaker unto becoming, in recent times, practically a dead letter. Christian religious institutions today still enjoy great social power based on their economic, cultural, and scientific prestige, and all this in accordance with the spirit characteristic of the modern era and of the man of today. In other words, the authentic Christian religious spirit was absorbed by the rationality and scepticism of modern man.

For a resurgence of the true Spirit of Jesus Christ, an event of as great a magnitude as that which inspired the Gospel itself was necessary. The authentic religious spirit cannot be revived by virtue of human reckonings, even those that have been made with the best of intentions, but through the direct design of the Being. Only a *divine intervention* can bring about in the man of today a rebirth of the true spirit of religion. The Message has perfectly filled this role in the

consciousness of the three religious priests of the Custody of the Holy Land. They have been stirred by the Message in the deepest roots of their devotion to Jesus Christ, and they have understood that it is indeed really and truly possible at this late stage of the twentieth century to come to a most complete and total rediscovery of the universal validity of the Gospel: *“For some of us, as is known to all, the immediate stimulus for this coming-to-consciousness has been our encounter with a person whom the Lord has sent us – we are convinced of it – and who has transmitted to us a message of life that has profoundly stirred our conscience about the realities of the Spirit, confirming us in our original and genuine Franciscan vocation, and making us ever more sensitive to the inner voice of the Shepherd and Father who leads us along His ways which are not man’s ways”* (p.224)

VI

AN INTERFERENCE BY THE INSTITUTION

Documents 43-51

The close exchange of letters between November 5 and December 22' was occasioned by an unexpected circumstance which, although short-lived, introduced into the already complex situation a further element of difficulty.

The communication is followed by Father Angelisanti's immediate rejoinder.

DOCUMENT 43

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

November 5, 1979

Dear Father Raffaele,

As a result of your having presented to the Holy Father the book "*The new earth of the new man,*" the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes communicates to me the following:

"At an examination of the contents, the publication reveals not only the pseudo-mystical ravings of the Authoress, but also a manifestly heterodox message, based both on the modern evolutionistic theory and on ancient gnosticism."

You will understand that, after such a caution, I find that I need to review the whole situation, and in particular:

- a) the fact that some of our religious frequent this group;
- b) Señorita Josefina's stay, with her followers, at the Milk Grotto;

c) finally, the question of the above-mentioned book, which carries the wording “Edited by the Custody of the Holy Land”, will also have to be studied.

As you see, dear Father Raffaele, I find myself in great difficulty and would certainly like everything to be settled without too much of a clamor and without stirring up further gossip.

I take this opportunity to wish you all the best in the Lord and to greet you fraternally.

F. Maurilio Sacchi, Custos

Apart from the “style” with which the judgment is expressed, the answer (if it can be considered an answer), even though dissenting, should have been addressed directly to the person concerned, who with earnest, filial sentiment had offered the work, accompanying it with a personal letter (cf. doc. 38, p.201); instead, the original letter from the Congregation is not even shown to him.

DOCUMENT 44

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY

Bethlehem

Bethlehem, November 6, 1979

Most Rev. Father
Maurilio Sacchi
Custos of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

Dear Father Custos,

I have read attentively and pondered your letter of the 5th of this month, in which you communicate to me the “three lines” with which the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes has thought to brand as fruit of a delirium and as a heresy – with a judgment that has all the airs of meaning to be definitive – the Message that for me and for my confreres who have a clear knowledge of it, has, because of its objective and personal circumstances and its contents, all the signs of a real experience of the Divine.

After what has occurred in the immediate past, and knowing ecclesiastical history sufficiently well, what has happened has not surprised me. From you, I would have wished some additional details concerning the communication given to you by the Sacred Congregation. It being a question of so important and delicate an issue, I do not believe the problem can be solved in a simple way and, as it were, hushed up. My entire religious life is at stake.

Ever since I entered the Franciscan religious life in October of 1935, until today, I have been following one same path which, in spite of my sins and failures to respond, has engaged me and continues to engage me in the passionate and humanly disinterested quest for the true and genuine Gospel message. Since Vatican II, my religious life has undergone unforeseen but marvelous developments. In me something has been born which I feel corresponds to my most profound existential aspirations, that is, to those aspirations that I have *always* intuited and towards which I have *always* been directed, first by my educators, then by my superiors, and finally by my own personal convictions. At the point at which I find myself after 44 years, an act of recanting would mean a denial of my entire life.

In this so dramatic an occurrence, I am made tranquil and serene by what St. Paul writes to the Romans: *“Be not slothful in zeal; be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope. Be patient in tribulation, persevering in prayer. Share the needs of the saints, practising hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse”*.

In regard to the question in itself, following your suggestion, I have spoken about it at length with the confreres concerned, and we are in agreement in maintaining that so generic and superficial a judgment cannot be sufficient to make us give up a position taken in all conscience and with full knowledge of the facts. Judgments of such a nature and which are formulated in such a way cannot be taken into consideration, no matter where they come from. The disposition to face well-defined and precise objections is complete on our part; the only thing indispensable would be that we be granted all the time needed for an exhaustive pondering over them, necessary condition for confronting them seriously and

conscientiously with our opinions and convictions. And I also assure you that if ever the results of such examining and confronting were to demonstrate to us and were able to convince us that the vision of the reality presented by the Message contained in the book in question is “*manifestly heterodox*”, as the judgment communicated to us affirms, we would not for one instant hesitate to admit it.

It is true that, at a hurried and superficial reading, the book can give the impression of containing the errors alluded to, and others as well, but a sufficiently thorough examination, made with intellectual humility and with the sense of the mystery, reveals an essential fidelity to the whole patrimony of truth transmitted to us by tradition with intuitions that rediscover and give full value to elements at times forgotten or neglected. For the right understanding of the Message, we have had the opportunity for very frequent, long, and quite thorough conversations with Señorita Josefina who is not at all the type to whom the “*pseudo-mystical ravings*” can be attributed, as the rash Sacred Congregation examiner has contemptuously defined the contents of the book. Such an expression evidently implies a judgment about the person as well, and it seems to us that a minimum of honesty and objectivity would have required at least an examination also of her other publications, listed in the book examined, and which are an integral part of the “Message” that this person transmits.

As far as we are concerned, our position has been determined not only by the elements offered by the contents of the books, but also by a convergence of facts and experiences that by now are drawn out over a period of more than twelve years, and which have made us very prudent in all that is related to this matter which, it seems to us, cannot be liqui-

dated in a hasty and superficial manner.

Regarding your concern about having to quickly review the whole situation, I express to you what our thinking is, following the points spelled out by you:

a) In regard to the problem of our religious who frequent this group and who are, ultimately, besides me, only Father Barriuso, Father Napoli, and Father Costantin, we were only waiting for your return in order to present to you a very precise and concrete petition which is not invalidated by this latest development; this development, on the contrary, makes us feel it more necessary than ever.

b) About the stay of Señorita Josefina and her “*followers*” at the Milk Grotto, do not be anxious inasmuch as she herself, as I have informed you orally, had already advised me – indeed before I received your letter and precisely on the 26th of last month – that she had “received from the Lord the order to leave the Milk Grotto” and was only waiting to learn what the Lord’s Will would be in regard to the date of departure. In any case, it would seem to us neither necessary nor urgent to take measures in this sense until the question were thoroughly clarified.

c) Lastly, as for the fact that the book has been edited by the Custody of the Holy Land, as things stand now, it decidedly does not seem to us to be the case for considering a retraction because the decision, with which the Discretorium of the Holy Land in its two sessions of May 28, 1976 authorized its publication, had been based on the authoritative judgment – condition required by the Discretorium as a guarantee – of the theologian Fr. Vittorino Joannes, expressed after a serious, detailed, and thorough examination, which cannot fail to have at least as much credit as the one expressed by the examiner

of the Sacred Congregation. It seems to us that decisions made with so much sense of personal responsibility by the former Discretorium of the Holy Land cannot be so easily annulled.

I reciprocate your "*wishes for all the best*" and greet you affectionately,

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

For the purpose of calmly discussing together the two problems – that of the petition of the 30th of October (cf. doc. 42, p.224) and that of the caution of the congregation (cf. doc. 43, p.231) – Fathers Barriuso, Angelisanti, Napoli, and Constantin agree with the Father Custos to have a meeting during an outing in Abu-Ghosh; but the Custos jumps the gun with the following letter.

DOCUMENT 45

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

November 17,1979

My dear Father Raffaele,

I am answering the joint letter of October 30th and yours of last November 6th.

I assure you that I have thought over the whole question a great deal and at length and, after also having consulted with and received advice from persons whom I consider excellent, prudent, and well-balanced, I have arrived at the conclusion-decision which I herein express to you, all this in the conviction and conscience of acting for the best as a confrere as well as a superior.

Given that:

– I must take into due account the caution expressed by the Sacred Congregation for Religious;

– I have the duty to handle the whole matter with utmost discretion and charity, as has also been recommended to me by our higher superiors;

– it is my concern that everything be smoothed out and cleared up without giving occasion for further useless and rash conclusions about the Movement and your persons,

it seems to me that I must establish the following:

1. Since Señorita Josefina has decided – as she herself told me – to leave spontaneously the Milk Grotto with all her Group, I think it is an excellent solution inasmuch as it does not necessitate special interventions: it remains as a free choice, and no one will have anything to say.

2. Since I am sure that the Discretorium of the Holy Land will not accept your petition for all four of you to go live at the Milk Grotto, I am not even considering presenting such a petition, in order to avoid the fact that its presentation and refusal may be a cause for aggravating the situation. Let each one stay in his convent, living tranquilly and fulfilling his daily duty, as you have done until now; and this also applies to Father Napoli.

3. Finally, until things are smoothed out, it is better that the volume “The New Earth of the new man,” remain in storage for obvious reasons, at least insofar as it concerns the Custody.

All these dispositions apply to a “waiting” period, that is, until everything is fully clarified.

You will have all the time and possibility to take – with calmness and serenity, without a fuss on anyone’s part – the steps that are necessary for reaching, in the best possible way, a clarification satisfactory for everyone, but especially for

yourselves.

This is a test the Lord has permitted – gold is tested in the crucible; learn to consider it as such and take it with the courage and humility required.

If the Lord asks you to wait, wait! How many movements, ideas, etc., have had to wait and suffer until it pleased the Lord (the way and the time He alone decides) to dissipate doubts, uncertainties, and hostilities.

Señorita Josefina has impressed me by the serenity with which she takes things and accepts them as signs from God!

Believe me, this is a question that distresses me and creates for me a great and serious problem of conscience, a problem that I am doing my utmost to resolve in a conscientious, serene, and charitable way.

I am convinced that this purpose can only be achieved in the manner indicated above.

Remember me in your prayers as I will remember all of you to the Lord.

Always fraternally in the name of Christ the Lord.

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi
Custos of the Holy Land

In the long and profitable meeting held on November 20th, the Custos, owing to the remonstrances expressed to him for having made decisions before the promised meeting was held, wished to make clear that the preceding letter, though it was an expression of his own thinking, was only a private one and in no way definitive.

The measures proposed by him were either revoked or reduced to their proper dimensions. Nevertheless, his decision not to act on the joint petition immediately remained unchanged for the sake of the matter itself, both because of the unforeseen snag created by the "caution " and because of the already taken-for-granted opposition from the Discretorium. As for the problem of the Congregation, he asked that a few practical suggestions be set forth in writing for him, which was done in the following letter.

DOCUMENT 46

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY

Bethlehem

Bethlehem, November 21, 1979

Most Rev. Father
Maurilio Sacchi
Custos of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

Dear Father Custos,

I enclose the practical suggestions you requested of us in yesterday's meeting, and which in our opinion could initiate in the fastest and most discreet way a solution of the problem that imposes a "*waiting*" period on our petition contained in the letter of last October 30th.

On our part, we feel the necessity to nail down one of the most important points that has been the object of clarification during the course of our meeting, and which expresses our convictions. We think it can be synthesized in the following manner:

At this time in which in the Church the coming-to-consciousness of a Superior Reality is taking place, which Reality exceeds the limits of any authority that may hinder or oppose what in man manifests itself as expression and exigency of this consciousness, and which can only be lived in full liberty – a liberty that makes possible one's total submission to the

Will of God – we request that such liberty be granted us within our religious Franciscan vocation in order to live the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by depending totally and unconditionally on the Will of the Father who is in heaven.

With fraternal affection,

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

November 21, 1979

Memorandum

1. Before answering the Sacred Congregation, we would consider it necessary for the Father Custos to provide the Father General – along with an accompanying letter from him – with complete and documented information about the procedure followed by the Custody of the Holy Land in the publication of the “The New Earth”.

2. Such documentation should include in particular:

– the letter of May 1, 1976, in which we requested from the Discretorium of the Holy Land authorization to publish the book;

– the letter of May 28, 1976, in which Father Raffaele, then Discret of the Holy Land, summarized the two discretorial sessions in which the publication of the book had been discussed and decided; the respective reply of Señorita Josefina of June 8, 1976;

– the letter of Fr. Vittorino Joannes dated May 15, 1976, addressed to the Father Custos;

– the detailed judgment of the same Fr. Vittorino Joannes on the book in question;

– the letter of Señorita Josefina “To the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land”, dated August 31, 1977;

– the letter of the Father Custos to Father Raffaele, dated November 5, 1979, and Father Raffaele’s respective answer dated November 6, 1979.

3. Given the delicacy, the importance, and the urgency of the case, we think that it is neither opportune nor sufficient to deal with the whole problem simply through correspondence, and it seems to us that it is necessary that it be dealt with in person at all levels. The person best suited is, for obvious reasons, Father Raffaele who, in the name of the Father Custos, will give the necessary explanations and will clarify eventual difficulties.

4. In the letter of reply to the Sacred Congregation, it would be advisable that the Father Custos express his own personal opinion about the persons and in particular about Señorita Josefina. We consider it premature and counter-productive to ask the Sacred Congregation to spell out their judgment before our having exhausted all the possibilities for obtaining a clarification on the personal level. For this, too, the person most suited is Father Raffaele (possibly together with Fr. Vittorino Joannes) either directly in the name of the Father Custos or through the Father General; this for the purpose of thoroughly clearing away any doubt and perplexity with the greatest objectivity and the most disinterested quest for the truth.

It seems to us that this proposal is part of the suggestion given by the Father General himself regarding the manner of proceeding in relation to the case: *“to handle the whole matter with utmost discretion and charity”*.

Personal Reflections

“At this time in which in the Church the coming-to-consciousness of a Superior Reality is taking place, which Reality exceeds the limits of any authority that may hinder or oppose what in man manifests itself as expression and exigency of this consciousness, and which can only be lived in full liberty – a liberty that makes possible one’s total submission to the Will of God – we request that such liberty be granted us within our religious Franciscan vocation in order to live the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by depending totally and unconditionally on the Will of the Father who is in heaven” (p.241).

It is true that in the religious Conferences and Ecumenical Councils the question of the true spirituality – a return to the true spirit of the Gospel – is frequently brought up for discussion. There have always been men within the Institution who have become aware of its falseness and have sought by theoretical proposals of spiritual renewal to somehow silence the reproach and, more than the reproach, the accusation that their conscience was making against them from their innermost depths. But in spite of these *reminders*, it is no less true that the interests of the world continued to predominate. Everything ended in a simple flapping of wings, a fluttering about of high-sounding words. Nothing changed, everything remained the same. Now then, the full Reality of the Spirit “... *can only be lived in full liberty – a liberty that makes possible one’s total submission to the Will of God; [therefore] we*

request that such liberty be granted us within our religious Franciscan vocation in order to live the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by depending totally and unconditionally on the Will of the Father who is in heaven “Everything revolves around a single issue: the liberty, the surrender of our liberty. From the moment in which we resolutely decide to surrender our liberty to the Being, we reject the mediation of every creature, that is to say, of every institution. It is in this way of taking up his liberty that a Franciscan can be faithful to Francis of Assisi and, consequently, to Jesus of Nazareth. It is in this unrestricted offering of our liberty to the Being wherein the full observance of the Gospel word is consummated. With regard to this surrender of their liberty to the Being, the three friars have been clear, precise and categorical.

It is important to highlight that with their petition for “liberty to live the pure Gospel”, the friars are beyond any intention of proposing reforms in the Institution. Some attempts at reform were, for instance, the Reformation initiated by Luther, the Counter-Reformation of the Council of Trent as well as, though to a lesser degree, the reform movements in the different religious Orders. But all these attempts at change were not touching the crux of the matter, because the evil in the institution is rooted in the *institution* as such. Institution and Truth are incompatible. To try to institutionalize the Truth is equivalent to distorting it. Awareness of this incompatibility between institution and Truth is one of the greatest accomplishments attained by the man of today; this is what we have proposed as the disqualification of the human. Up to now the historical revolutions and plans for reform were attempted from without, that is, as rectifications of the established order. In contrast, what the three friars

propose is an inner revolution, a coming-to-consciousness of the fact that the human no longer holds the appeal for being the essential house of man, and before the fact of this disqualification of the human, we place our liberty in the hands of the Being.

What does it mean, in practice, to surrender our liberty to the Being? To begin, it means the renunciation of our own will. As one might suppose, such a renunciation is incomprehensible and inadmissible when one is installed in the I-ego, in the world, in the “kingdom of the prince of this world”. But it is also true that such a renunciation of his liberty does not ultimately come from man himself, but is a grace he receives when he truly lives the disqualification of the human in the presence of the Divine. This disposition to let go of everything in order to be unconditionally and resolutely dependent on the Will obeys a call that comes to us from the Being. And the true religious spirit consists precisely in accepting this call without hesitation. The true religious spirit consists in nothing less than translating into deeds the *word* of the Being, in letting go of all human ties, remaining in the indigence of the human, and becoming servants, slaves of the Father: “*My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work*” (Jn 4: 34); it is the *Fiat* of Mary: “*Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be done in me according to Thy word*” (Lk 1: 38).

Much as I have wanted to find a weighty reason that might have motivated the Roman Catholic Institution’s refusal of the three Franciscans’ petition to be left “free to live the pure Gospel,” I certainly have not found any. Could it be that Grace is already forsaking the men who sustain this Institution because they have identified themselves with it? Everything leads us to suppose that this is so: “*He who is of God*

hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (Jn 8:47).

The contacts with Father Joannes bring into prominence various aspects of the situation and clearly manifest the position of each one of the persons concerned.

We omit some points of Father Joannes' last letter of December 22nd because of their being too personal, though by doing so, we are renouncing not a few illuminating elements.

DOCUMENT 47

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY
Bethlehem

Bethlehem, November 28, 1979

My dear Father Vittorino,

In agreement with the Father Custos and taking advantage of Giovanni's trip to Milan, I am sending you, also on behalf of Father Barriuso and Father Napoli, the documentation on everything that relates to the book "The 'New Earth'" so that you too may have, before intervening in any way, the most complete view possible of the situation and, knowing the position assumed by us subsequent to the caution of the Sacred Congregation for Religious, you may give us your opinion in this regard. Giovanni will orally provide you with further details.

The question, in our opinion, is not one of hushing up the

matter, but rather of clarifying it with the utmost disinterest and love for the truth. This clarification is also necessary for dissipating in the minds of the Father General and the Father Custos any doubt that might constitute an obstacle to our aspirations expressed in our letter of last October 30th, of which I am sending you a copy.

The ideal thing in our opinion would be to reach the Sacred Congregation for Religious through personal meetings in an unofficial way, in order to induce them to review their judgment – hasty to say the least – expressed on the person and the book. The judgment shows a deep and total incomprehension; this being so, it should not be difficult to eliminate it by contrasting it with a detailed and conscientious judgment as is the one given by you to the Discretorium of the Holy Land, and which could be strengthened with further explanations made personally by you and me at all levels.

The first step, according to us, should be that of meeting with the Father General to whom the Father Custos has already decided to send a complete documentation of the procedure followed by the Custody for the publication of the book, documentation which, according to our suggestion, should be delivered by me personally. As a second step, contact should be made with the Sacred Congregation for Religious. Particularly on this point, we would like to know your opinion regarding the most expedient manner for arranging this contact. According to us, the ideal thing would be to reach in this area a solution to the problem by means of a retraction of the judgment made; in case this should prove to be impossible, since our only interest is the truth, there would be no opposition or hesitation on our part that the discussion of the case should reach extreme situations such as that of a formal process at the more competent Sacred

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. On the other hand, it is not a matter of a work or doctrine, fruit of human reflection that may be susceptible to correction or that can admit of retraction. The contents of the book presents itself as a Message, and the person who communicates it has all the guarantees so that what she affirms can be made the object of utmost consideration, although, since it is a matter of a vision of reality that transcends the perspective of the usual theology, one shouldn't wonder that it can arouse suspicions of heterodoxy. Judging by our experience, the light that springs forth from it, once understood in its fullness and profundity, is such as to impose itself on the intelligence by the force of the evidence.

On our part, therefore, given the extreme seriousness, gravity, and vastness of the contents of this Message, which one can neither remain indifferent to nor, much less, renounce simply to avoid painful situations, we are disposed to run all the risks, and this certainly not for the human satisfaction of obtaining the recognition of an idea or conviction of our own, but only that the truth, whatever it be, may emerge in all its transparency.

I hope I have been sufficiently clear. Waiting to learn your specific and valuable opinion, I am grateful for what you have already done in the past, and for what in your kindness and understanding you may wish to do in the present and in the future. May the seraphic Father assist us so that the truth which he had very much at heart may illumine the intelligence of those who come to know it. I greet you affectionately,

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

DOCUMENT 48

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

December 7, 1979

Ideas extracted from a letter to the Father Custos from Father Vittorino Joannes, dated November 22, 1979:

“It seemed somewhat strange, to tell the truth, that no one had yet come forward! Now they have come forward, and in a rather heavy way and, therefore, the matter must be faced. I must tell you that if I too am a little the cause, I am deeply sorry about this; but on the other hand, I applied myself to the matter with great attention and without bias; I sought to understand as best I could. I analyzed the manuscript.

Two positions could have been taken:

Either reject it totally because of its being absolutely unproposable with regard to dogmatic orthodoxy or with regard to the normal theological literature;

Or else understand it as a possible theological reflection on the Biblical data of Revelation.

Now then, it seemed to me that it was not to be rejected altogether as a hypothesis of reflection on the revealed datum, but always understanding it, of course, within a correct dogmatic and ecclesial interpretation of such datum and (above all) without understanding it as a Revelation that could add something to the official one.

I made such a judgment also because my rather extensive knowledge of other classics of the past led me to judge the

text with theological accuracy but with sympathy as well.

Another question apart from this, which is not to be confused with the book itself, is that of the “Movement” that links itself with it and takes it as the source of its theological or spiritual inspiration; it is clear that anyone can interpret a text in his own way, emphasize it to the maximum, even to the point of substituting it, or almost, for the genuine sources of Revelation and of the Magisterium, or else see it as the only way of interpreting them.

In such a case, it would not be the fault of the book but of those who interpret it without prudence and a certain detachment, which one should always have with regard to any work that interprets the sources of Revelation.

At the most, it could be admitted that a given work (as in this case) easily lends itself to such wrong interpretations.

You ask me, moreover (and it is the fundamental question), what I think with regard to such a heavy judgment expressed in the letter from Rome: I think that it is indeed much too heavy and much too generic. There is a fact, however: if one sets out to contest such a judgment, or to defend the contents of the Work, this would only serve to increase the alarm on the part of Rome, to trigger additional investigations, perhaps even to handing over the book to the Holy Office, with the foreseeable consequences: an annoying business especially for the Custody.

Therefore, let the Custody deal only with the Sacred Congregation for Religious, without going outside of that level; such Congregation, in effect, is not empowered to pronounce judgments on matters of faith, or condemnations of works, and will undoubtedly not do so; it will limit itself to handling the matter from a disciplinary standpoint, and if the

matter remains on this level, it can be easily settled without bringing about other consequences.

I know well that there are some weak points: one or two, because after all the book carries the editorial label of the Custody.

Notwithstanding the fact that I think that the judgment by Rome cited by you is too heavy, and undue, nevertheless I do not deem it to be really the case for entering into a doctrinal hassle; whatever value the book in question may have, it is not worthwhile for the Custody to embark – even though only apparently – upon its defense.

If it has any value, time will tell.”

Friar Maurilio Sacchi

DOCUMENT 49

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY
Bethlehem

Bethlehem, December 8, 1979

My dear Father Vittorino,

Yesterday, I received from the Father Custos two typewritten folios in which he communicated to me some “ideas extracted” from the letter that you had written him on the 22nd of last month. My letter of November 28th, which Giovanni will deliver to you together with this one, seems to have been purposely written in order to clarify the inner attitude adopted by me and by Fathers Barriuso and Napoli.

From the reading of the documentation that I am sending you, you will clearly see our problem, which is not of a theoretical or speculative nature but of an existential one; it is, namely, something that involves our Franciscan vocation, a vocation that we have rediscovered not only through the meditation on the “Message” contained in the book *The New Earth of the new man*, but above all in the contact with the persons who live the “Message”. The book is not fruit of speculation but an expression of a lived experience.

Our problem is not of a disciplinary or doctrinal order so that it could be silenced. I believe that it is well expressed in what I wrote to the Father Custos on last November 21st: *“At this time in which in the Church the coming-to-consciousness of a Superior Reality is taking place, which Reality exceeds the limits of any authority that may hinder or oppose what in man manifests itself as expression and exigency of this consciousness, and which can only be lived in full liberty – a liberty that makes possible one’s total submission to the Will of God – we request that such liberty be granted us within our religious Franciscan vocation in order to live the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by depending totally and unconditionally on the Will of the Father who is in heaven.”* .

I, as well as Fathers Barriuso and Giacinto, would be happy to have an answer from you. Merry Christmas and affectionate greetings.

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

DOCUMENT 50

Milan, December 22, 1979

Dear Father Raffaele,

I have received your letter, the packet with all the texts, and then Giovanni has spoken to me at length about everything. I have tried to think over again and to reflect at length on everything. And I should like to have time to extend myself further, something which unfortunately is not working out as I would like. But I have the duty and need to say at least some fundamental things. As I have already told the Father Custos, I too maintain that the judgment that has come from the Sacred Congregation is hasty, heavy, without articulate reasons and perhaps... induced by not-too-clear motives in those who have solicited it or in those who have brought it about. I think too that the best thing would be to have direct contacts with that Sacred Congregation.

.....

And, on the other hand, it seems to me that the Father Custos himself still shows concern and understanding. But in his position (between interventions by Rome and aversions in the Custody), it is true that he finds himself in grave difficulties. Now he has answered the Sacred Congregation, and from what I can intuit, he has done so certainly not in the sense of a total and acritical acceptance; also because he knows well the persons involved, for whom he has esteem; and he is not, fortunately, the kind of person who thinks one thing and says another. At this point, I am of the opinion that it would be better to let him act directly; to interpose and request something else could be seriously harmful. When he reports about

this and takes up the matter again, then the whole thing may be reconsidered anew. But in the meantime, I repeat, it would be better to wait. The prudence, also suggested by the Father General (*“to handle the whole matter with utmost discretion and charity”*), I believe are words to be taken confidently as true: we have no reason to doubt this. On the other hand (and this is something I personally have very much at heart), at this time we must look to the welfare of the whole Catholic community and to the grave problems that the Holy Father (and whoever for him) has to face; and whatever value and importance a conviction of ours on even the most serious matters might have, we must live them, consider them, face them within this great sense of discipline, first of all spiritual. I think that the Lord, whatever Message He may entrust to a believer (and it is quite possible He may do this), certainly does so always in service to and for the good of His Church – supreme value and reality which we must love and venerate above all – and, within the Church, the Custody of the Holy Land, which manifests a great part of the very soul of the Church. Now then, if the Message has any value, it has it certainly within this capacity to love and venerate the Church in its needs and in its particular problems, even though the path should be hard and slow. In short, time is like Grace: it is against us if we do not work with it. All this, however, is absolutely different from “let time take its course” (which is only human prudence). But to place oneself, even with suffering, in the hands of the Church, and of whoever has a specific ministry in it, is the best service, the safest that can be rendered to a Message which the Lord in His love can have given. Therefore, I repeat, it would be better to continue to wait. Meanwhile: pray that “His” will, not “ours” be done. I believe that living – how fortunately! – in Bethlehem, the holy and mysterious Grotto from which the great Light always

shines, will truly suggest to you this sense of an Advent full of hope, trust, serenity. I pray for this, for you, for whoever will have to take it upon himself to see things in the light of the divine Word. I hope to hear from you soon; meanwhile, accept my fraternal greetings and wishes,

Friar Vittorino Joannes

The problem opened by the “caution “ was closed with a clarifying and reassuring reply from the Father Custos to the Sacred Congregation. But the imminence of the canonical Visit led, at this point, to a turning over to the Father Visitor the petition of October 30, already made to the Custos.

With the parting letter of Señorita Josefina and the subsequent departure of the Group from the Milk Grotto on January 10, 1980, a phase is concluded and another opens in which the only protagonists of the events recorded in the rest of this documentation are Franciscan religious.

The first action with which Fathers Barriuso, Angelisanti, and Napoli assume the responsibility mentioned in the following letter is their commitment to carry on personally, in a constant daily attendance, the Exposition displayed at the Christian Information Centre, which up to that time had been taken care of by the people of the Milk Grotto Group.

DOCUMENT 51

Bethlehem, December 22, 1979

Rev. Father Custos
Maurilio Sacchi
Custody of the Holy Land
Jerusalem, Israel

Esteemed Father Maurilio,

As I told you in our conversation at the Christian Information Centre, since the 26th of October, the Lord has announced to me that I must leave the Milk Grotto and Bethlehem; as I told you, I was waiting for Him to let me know the date of departure and the place where I should go – that which He has made known to me on the 15th of this month.

Today the Lord has communicated to me that I have already fulfilled in this place the mission He had entrusted to me, the mission of transmitting His Message to the Franciscans belonging to the Custody of the Holy Land, as I made known to all of you by letter on August 31, 1977.

The Lord's Message which is being lived here in the house of the Milk Grotto ever since the year 1975 by groups of persons – those of us who have made up our minds to live in *unconditional submission* to the Divine Will – is contained in the books “*Yo, en Cristo Resucitado*” [“I, in Christ Arisen”] edited by the Custody of the Holy Land, “*Peregrinación del Pueblo de Dios*” [“Pilgrimage of the People of God”], “*Un Mundo según el Corazón de Dios*” [“A World according to the Heart of God”], “*Peregrinación del Pueblo de Dios* –

explicación de los Grabados” [“Pilgrimage of the People of God – Explanation of the Drawings”], *“Viviendo el Evangelio”* [“Living the Gospel”], all of them presented by Fr. J. Barriuso; *“The New Earth”*, presented by Fr. R. Angelisanti, and which, in agreement with the Holy Land Discretorium was edited in the name of the Custody of the Holy Land, and [is also contained] in the drawings displayed at the Christian Information Centre and at the Milk Grotto house, in addition to other writings. All this remains, by Will of the Lord, under the care of Fathers R. Angelisanti, G. Napoli and J. Barriuso who have had direct contact with this lived experience of the Message here in the Milk Grotto house, have collaborated in the presentation of the books and in our stay here in Israel, and together with you and your Discretorium have also made possible the official authorization of the group’s residence at the Milk Grotto house, according to a letter to Father Raffaele dated May 7, 1978.¹

I, together with the persons who accompany me, am very grateful to you for the collaboration rendered by you and your Discretorium so that in this place the Divine Will could be fulfilled. We will keep you very much in our prayers before the Lord so that He may illumine you in your difficult mission, and that you may accomplish it according to His Will.

Wishing you a happy Christmas and New Year in the Lord and Our Mother, I take my leave of you.

Yours truly,
the slave of the lord

I am sending copies of this letter to Fathers Raffaele, Napoli and Barriuso for their information.

VII

CONSCIENCE AND INSTITUTION

Documents 52-64

The new and important clarifications contained in the letter to the Visitor, Fr. Heinrich Furst, O.F.M., and its attached documents explain the sense and scope of the petition turned over to him.

We are at a new turning point in the events. Now the examination of the matter is remitted to the Capitular Congress which, nevertheless, owing to quite exceptional circumstances, will take place almost one year later, imposing an additional long wait upon those concerned, each one in his own convent.

The letter was delivered to the Father Visitor before the Visit to each one of the persons concerned.

DOCUMENT 52

Most Rev. Fr. Heinrich Furst
Visitor General of the
Custody of the Holy Land

Very Reverend Father,

Inasmuch as you are Visitor General of the Holy Land and President of the next Capitular Congress, we are turning over to you a petition made recently to the Father Custos, Fr. Maurilio Sacchi. Briefly, our petition is as follows: we ask that we be allowed to live at the Shrine of the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem for the reasons and purposes expressed in our letter to the Father Custos, dated October 30, 1979, which we now hand over to you.

In order to give you the possibility to better understand what is said in it and to personally realize the importance we give to the request, we present to you an account of the events that in one way or another have influenced our decision, recapitulating in a very summarized way the contents of the attached documents. The account that follows refers especially to Fathers José Barriuso, Raffaele Angelisanti, and Giuseppe (Giacinto) Napoli, who from the beginning have been directly involved in the events narrated. Father Giuseppe Costantin, although not being altogether alien to the unfolding of the events, and although coinciding fundamentally in the same convictions and aspirations, has arrived through other ways at the joint coming-to-consciousness matured in the decision of which the letter of last October 30th is an expression.

For more than a decade now, we have been in contact with a person by the name of Josefina Chacín, who has communicated to us by her word, by her writings, and by the example of her life an exceptional experience of the Being which she had for the first time in the year 1954, an experience from which emerges a metaphysical-theological-spiritual Message contained in various publications prepared and presented by Father José Barriuso beginning from 1967, and the last one by Father Raffaele Angelisanti in 1977.

It has been precisely the problem of the publication of the last writing, which carries the title “The ‘New Earth’ of the new man” and which is to be held as the most complete and profound expression of the Message up to now, that induced us to request a first joint meeting with the Father Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi, a meeting that took place on April 29, 1976.

The problem consisted in this: the authoress was entrusting

to us the publication of the manuscript because, according to a communication given her by the Lord, the Franciscans, and in particular those of the Holy Land, have a special role to play in relation to the Message which must be transmitted to all humanity, starting out from the Holy Land. Given our acquaintance with the person and our knowledge of a combination of elements and facts to which for a good many years we had been witnesses, and also our knowledge of the contents of the Message which, quite apart from its origin, we regarded as a brilliant conquest of a theoretical and practical nature that corresponds to the most intimate questionings of the contemporary consciousness, we could not in conscience take such an affirmation lightly; on the other hand, as religious, we were not allowed to take any initiative without due authorization.

The Father Custos suggested to us that we present in writing to the Discretorium our request for printing the manuscript, which we did in our letter of May 1, 1976.¹

Before presenting our request to the Discretorium, the Father Custos entrusted Father Vittorino Joannes, Franciscan theologian of the province of Milan, with the responsibility of meeting with some of us in order to talk about the problem. Father Vittorino, in the report he sent to the Father Custos after our meeting (cf. letter of May 15, 1976²), expressed his positive impression regarding the whole matter and proposed judgment criteria and practical suggestions to the Father Custos, indicating to him that the simplest and most correct course would be that of submitting to the Discretorium the decision to publish the work. He ended his letter with these words: *“It seems to me, as you had already stated and as I am fully convinced, that in such a step, the fact that should be strongly underlined is the ticklishness and the “historic”*

responsibility of a refusal and a total closing-off to experiences that are multiplying in the Holy Land lately, and that should induce one to reflect on the duty and responsibilities of the Custody precisely in this moment, so difficult yet so alive for the history of the Church”.

Owing to this, the problem of the publication of the work was very seriously examined and discussed during two discretorial sessions held on May 28, 1976. The thorough examination of the different facets that the problem presented ended in the acceptance of the proposal and in the decision that the book be edited by the same Custody of the Holy Land, also with a contribution on its part to the expenses for publishing the work – this, however, on condition that the manuscript be previously examined by a qualified theologian who would express in writing a judgment on its doctrinal contents (cf. letter from Father R. Angelisanti, then a discret of the Holy Land, to Señorita Josefina, dated May 30, 1976).

Señorita Josefina, having learned of the Discretorium’s proposal, wrote: “...*Personally, the attitude of the Discretorium seems to me to be very positive and open to the faith. Blessed be the Lord! The fact of their wanting another person to read and examine the book before its publication to me means one more guarantee and a much appreciated help in my difficult position as simple instrument of the Lord, ever fallible in whatever error of expression.*

“Once again, my part is only to be grateful to the Lord for the fact that He Himself continues to designate the instruments and to open the way by which His Message must reach the men of the “New Earth”. Whatever the result, it will be Will of God for me; to this Will, I cling unconditionally” (Letter to Father R. Angelisanti of June 8, 1976).

The manuscript was then submitted for examination to Father Vittorino Joannes who, in his writing, “Reading notes taken on the work ‘The New Earth’”, sent to the Father Custos on June 17, 1976, spelled out the conclusions he had reached.

In it, the theologian from Milan, after having “*carefully examined, attentively read, each page of the work, re-reading passages and making comparisons, pausing in a special way on those particularly new and original views and themes where it would be easier to raise objections or become opposed*”, and having “*in the reading of the work (taken as a whole as well as considered in its single points or passages) ... always kept in mind the exigencies for correctness in the de fide dogmatic expressions, that is, of the faith professed by the Catholic Church*”, and after having made the due distinctions as to the “*theological perspective*” with which the work must be read – gave a very positive, even enthusiastic, judgment of it which came to confirm our personal convictions. Defining the contents of the work as “*a broad ‘theology of the Being’ which unfolds in innumerable nuances, very delicate but very rich as to philosophical, theological, spiritual implications*”, he underlined its novelty (“*This ‘novelty’, nevertheless, never becomes opposed – in my opinion, and I have reflected on it a good deal – to the doctrine dogmatically acquired...*”) and its ecumenical quality (“*ecumenical*”, *not only because I find there many precious elements for a spiritual-theological encounter with traditions of the Eastern Churches and with the Reformation theology..., but also because in its global vision, it assumes universal religious values and intuitions, from the first of the pre-Socratic philosophical-theological experiences to those of the great cosmic and historical non-Christian religions*”).

Owing to this judgment, so reassuring for all, the publishing of the book was begun, book which appeared in its original text in December 1977, and in the Italian, English, and French translations the following year – notwithstanding the lack of the financial contribution on the part of the Custody, contribution which had been decided upon in due course by the Discretorium.

In the meantime, ever since April 1975, Señorita Josefina with other people who share and live together the ideal of an evangelical life, fully submitted to the Will of God, had begun – with due permission from the Father Guardian of Bethlehem and the Father responsible for the Milk Grotto, and with the foreknowledge of the Father Custos – to reside at the Milk Grotto, giving us the opportunity to go deeper together into the contents of the Message and to assimilate it intellectually and vitally.

With the date of the Capitular Congress of 1977 approaching, and foreseeing assignment changes in the Monastery of Bethlehem, we felt it our duty to ask the new Discretorium that, in the formation of the new families, it take into account our exigency to be placed in a situation enabling us to continue the experience initiated and, at the same time, that it let the other people who were residing at the Milk Grotto continue to stay there with an official authorization, so that what the Lord had given us might not be lost through carelessness or incomprehension. After having highlighted one of the fundamental points of the spirituality of the Message, that is, the unconditional submission of the human liberty to the Will of God which expresses itself in the primacy of “being” over “doing”, and of the Acting of God over our own purely human initiatives, we concluded by saying: *“In over five years of contact with the people committed to living the*

'Message', we have been able to verify with our own eyes that it is not just a matter of words or abstract principles, but rather of an experience lived to the fullest that bears witness of itself. It is a living reality, evangelical and Franciscan, that has become deeply engraved in our consciences and which we feel the need to make known to our confreres and to all who are thirsty for eternal life. Perhaps there has been born, or has been given to us as a gift, that something which we all, more or less consciously, have long desired and which in the last Custodial Chapter, when spiritual themes were being discussed, we sought with the anguished question so often repeated in the meeting hall: What are we to do?' We are deeply convinced that spiritual realities are not 'created' by human decisions and measures but are 'born' and are received 'as a gift', as is everything that is life and divine life. The one thing that is being asked of us is that we take care of this sprout of life and help it to grow there where it is" (cf. letter of August 29, 1977).

The Father Custos, coming to know our problem, orally expressed to Señorita Josefina the desire that, with regard to the authorization for the Group to reside permanently at the Milk Grotto, she herself present a formal request in writing. Señorita Josefina, after a day or so of intense prayer "*in order to consult the Lord*" as she is accustomed to doing before taking a step of any importance, felt that she had to address the letter, which bears the date of August 31, 1977, not to the Father Custos or to the Discretorium, but to all the Franciscans of the Custody taken individually, asking the Father Custos to publish it for the information of all those to whom it was directed.

A combination of things of a discretionary nature did not allow the publishing of said letter in the Acta Custodiae

Terrae Sanctae. This induced the undersigned, after speaking of it with the Father Custos, to publish it on December 1, 1977, in a pamphlet, accompanied by a letter of presentation (cf. pamphlet “To the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land”).

The long letter “*is not*”, as we pointed out in our presentation, “*the usual ‘request for something’ but, rather, an appeal to the consciences*”. In it, Señorita Josefina briefly offers the contents of her particular experience, explains the reason for her frequent visits made to the Holy Land by order of the Lord and, after an account of her repeated and frequent contacts with some religious of the Custody, concludes with what she believes to be “*the request the Lord is making of the Franciscans, custodians of the Holy Land*”.

Because of the importance this letter holds for its having determined our concrete decision, we reproduce here its main and most significant parts:

“Dearly beloved brothers in the Heart of Christ,

According to the request of the Father Custos, fulfilling the Will of the Lord at whose service I find myself since August 22, 1954, when by His grace I came to consciousness of the unconsciousness in which I was living, I am addressing all of you in order to tell you:

In this coming-to-consciousness, the Lord has made known to me at different moments the ‘Message’ that through several writings I have tried to express:

That the hour is coming and is now! in which the true worshippers must worship God in spirit and in truth, submitting themselves unconditionally to His Divine Will, after the example of Jesus of Nazareth, because the moment of His Justice is coming.

That the time of mankind's 'evolution' in the knowledge of good and evil is coming to an end, and man must freely and consciously affirm his decision in the Being or in the 'non-being': in 'being' or in 'doing'; in God or in the creature; in Love or in Power: in God's Will or in His Permission. And that, in order for man to know and come to consciousness of these realities, it is necessary that His 'Message' be spread from this Holy Land, Scripture thus becoming fulfilled.

And it is to the Franciscans, custodians of the Holy Places, to whom this mission is first offered, mission which must be accepted or rejected freely and consciously by each one, for this is not a Message that can be preached by word alone; rather, along with the preaching of it goes the committing of one's life in order to be transformed by the force of the 'living word' which the Message contains, bringing about in each one the coming-to-consciousness necessary for his personal decision.

It is for the purpose of transmitting this knowledge, more with my life than with my words, that the Lord has repeatedly sent me to this Holy Land over the course of more than ten years, and during this time I have been in contact with some Franciscan Fathers who already know the 'Message' in the form that the Lord has gradually presented it to them, and which is already beginning to be an experiential reality

.....

In 1976, while in Venezuela, I received a letter from Father Raffaele, dated May 30th of the same year, in which he informed me that the book of the Message of the Lord, "The New Earth" presented by him would be edited by the Custody of the Holy Land, over which fact I rejoice with all my heart since this means an initial opening-up to the Lord's Word

contained in His Message; but this is not enough. To be able to 'savour' the life of liberation that this Message contains, it is necessary to be thoroughly acquainted with it. As I said before, it is not for preaching by word alone but by the commitment of one's life in order to be transformed by the force of the 'living word' that it contains. Only in this way will it be possible for each one to come to the consciousness necessary for the personal decision that the Lord requests, and which I have expressed at the beginning of this writing.

It is required, therefore, that there be a place in the Holy Land, according to the Lord's Will, destined to 'gather' the experience lived by the people who come to have contact with the Message, where the persons who seek to live the same ideal may meet, just as we have been doing here at the Milk Grotto in a provisional way without official acceptance by the Custody for said purpose.

It seems to me that it is the request the Lord is making of the Franciscans, custodians of the Holy Land, following their acceptance of the mission that is being offered to them. It is to ask for 'lodging' for those who have 'conceived' the Word of the Lord and want to 'give birth' in themselves to the 'New Creature', born not of carnal will nor of the will of men, but of the Will of God.

On you, brothers, depends whether this 'New Creature' is born within or without the Custody of the Holy Land."

The official authorization from the Discretorium for the Group to "reside in the House at the Milk Grotto" arrived on May 7, 1978, in a written communication from the Father Custos to Father R. Angelisanti.

This positive communication, however, manifests not a few incomprehensions, possibly caused by an involuntary basic

misunderstanding:

a. the profoundly evangelical and Franciscan Message is confused with a personal “*devotion*” or with a “*movement*” foreign to the spirit of the Holy Places and of our mission (we happen to know that the Custos, even though he wrote the letter, did not personally identify with this point);

b. we are charged with having presented “*a Message officially approved by the Custody*”: if these words allude to what had been said with regard to the publication of the book “The ‘New Earth’”, and to the fact that the book carries the editorial label of the Custody, this is true, because it is true that it was the Discretorium of the Holy Land who made such a decision, as transpires from the letter dated May 30, 1976, and in this case it was up to the one who had the duty to do so to dispel the “*perplexities*” which no one has ever expressed to us personally. If, on the contrary, such words intend to attribute to us the fact of having stated that the Custody has made the contents of the Message its own, this is certainly false, because in the letters that make up the pamphlet, nothing of the sort is said;

c. the desire expressed by us – that in the formation of the new families our exigency to be placed in a situation enabling us to continue the experience initiated be taken into account – is interpreted seven months later as a request for authorization to “*frequent the Group*”.

d. the experience of a spiritual nature undertaken by us Franciscans together with other persons who do not belong to any institution is placed on the same plane as other cases altogether different, such as the given example of the Theophany community to which the Custody has granted “*the use of the Little Convent of the Desert of St. John*” with a contract

drawn up between the two institutions.

It was precisely the new Discretorium's concern to draw up a contract also with the Milk Grotto Group that moved the Father Custos to write Father Raffaele the letter of December 17, 1978. We have never wanted to accept this idea, even though apparently reasonable and advantageous for both parties, because of the grave misunderstanding it could lead to. Indeed, it was not a matter of "renting" a Shrine to an Institution alien to the Custody, but of giving "lodging", in the bosom of the Custody of the Holy Land Institution itself, to a spiritual reality in our opinion wanted by the Lord and, in any case, anything but alien to the most profound exigencies of the Franciscan ideal to which we have all consecrated ourselves, a reality which, although having been communicated to us through a person not juridically belonging to the Franciscan Order, had already taken root in us Franciscans and was asking to be recognized as legitimate child of the Custody and allowed to grow there where it had been born.

Another factor, not always understood and never taken into due consideration, has impeded the drawing up of a contract: the obedience to the Will of God which Señorita Josefina feels in conscience she must live in all its strictness, which obedience, while it implies one's total availability and therefore freedom from any kind of tie to the creatures, also means, in her case, having to wait for the Lord's inspiration before taking a step in this direction.

At any rate, by express desire of the Lord manifested on October 26, 1979, the Group, with the exception of two persons, left the Milk Grotto on January 10, 1980.

Señorita Josefina, in her letter of thanks to the Father Custos dated December 22, 1979, as a result of a communica-

tion from the Lord received on the same day, declares that she had *“already fulfilled... the mission “ that the Lord “had entrusted” to her, “the mission of transmitting His Message to the Franciscans belonging to the Custody of the Holy Land”, and that “All this remains, by Will of the Lord”, entrusted to “the care of Fathers R. Angelisanti, G. Napoli and J. Barriuso who have had direct contact with this lived experience of the Message here in the Milk Grotto house “ and “have collaborated in the presentation of the books and in our stay here in Israel”.*

The last words – within the context of our whole experience briefly summarized in this account – come to be perceived and received by us as an express invitation from the Lord; we feel all the heavy responsibility of this invitation, responsibility for which we request understanding and respect.

We have not the slightest intention whatsoever of imposing on anyone the convictions at which we have arrived through such a mysterious and unexpected way. We understand all too well the sentiment of repulsion that such a way can arouse in those who are seeing things from without, and we recognize that one can reach the same state of consciousness through innumerable other ways which only the Lord knows. But for us who are living this reality from within, a problem of conscience arises that we cannot evade.

With our petition to live at the Shrine of the Milk Grotto, we in no way wish to isolate ourselves from our confreres, nor do we, much less, wish to create something new. It is precisely the conviction which we have reached that makes us perceive the inanity of any initiative that might tend to re-propose attempts at reform or ascetic-spiritual adventures of old or new coinage. What we are asking, with trepidation but also with faith, is not to be placed on the plane of “doing” but

of “being”; it is not of a moral-ascetic order but of an ontological one; it is not work or initiative of our own but obedience in faith and availability for the Work of God.

We believe that our petition can be summarized in the following manner:

At this time in which in the Church the coming-to-consciousness of a Superior Reality is taking place, which Reality exceeds the limits of any authority that may hinder or oppose what in man manifests itself as expression and exigency of this consciousness, and which can only be lived in full liberty – a liberty that makes possible one’s total submission to the Will of God – we request that such liberty be granted us *within our religious Franciscan vocation* in order to live the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by depending totally and unconditionally on the Will of the Father who is in heaven.

Given the importance and novelty of the petition, it is our keen desire to have the opportunity to meet with you at the Milk Grotto. By examining it together and on the very site, the petition will be more easily understood in its true value and genuine significance.

Counting on your personal efforts towards the realization of our vocation in the next Capitular Congress, we thank you in advance and greet you fraternally in our Seraphic Father St. Francis.

José Barriuso

Giuseppe Napoli

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti Friar Giuseppe Costantin

Bethlehem, Emmaus, Nazareth, March 19, 1980

Attached documents:

1. Letter from Fathers J. Barriuso, R. Angelisanti, G. Napoli, and G. Costantin to the Father Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi, dated October 30, 1979.

2. Letter from Fathers J. Barriuso, R. Angelisanti and G. Napoli to the Father Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi, and the Holy Land Discrets, dated May 1, 1976.

3. Letter from Father Vittorino Joannes to the Father Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi, dated May 15, 1976.

4. Letter from Father R. Angelisanti to Señorita Josefina, dated May 30, 1976.

5. Letter from Señorita Josefina to Father R. Angelisanti, dated June 8, 1979.

6. "Reading notes taken on the Work 'The New Earth'" sent by Father Vittorino Joannes to the Father Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi, on June 17, 1976.

7. Letter from Fathers J. Barriuso, R. Angelisanti, and G. Napoli to the Father Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi. and the Discrets of the Holy Land, dated August 29, 1977.

8. Pamphlet "To the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land," containing the Letter from Señorita Josefina, dated August 31, 1977, preceded by a Letter of presentation by Fathers J. Barriuso, R. Angelisanti and G. Napoli, dated December 1, 1977.

9. Letter from the Father Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi, to Father R. Angelisanti, dated May 7, 1978.

10. Letter from the Father Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi, to Father R. Angelisanti, dated December 17, 1978.

11. Letter from Señorita Josefina to the Father Custos. Father Maurilio Sacchi, dated December 22, 1979-

Copy of this letter and attached documents to the new Father Custos of the Holy Land.

Personal Reflections

“Given our acquaintance with the person and our knowledge of a combination of elements and facts to which for a good many years we had been witnesses, and also our knowledge of the contents of the Message which, quite apart from its origin, we regarded as a brilliant conquest of a theoretical and practical nature that corresponds to the most intimate questionings of the contemporary consciousness, we could not, in conscience, take such an affirmation lightly; on the other hand, as religious, we were not allowed to take any initiative without due authorization” (p.262).

The most crucial and decisive fact about contemporary man is that all Western history culminates and is consummated in him. Twenty-five centuries of the rule of rationality ends up today in the definitive verification of the fact that human reason can no longer continue being the guide of human destiny. This verification has caused the deepest crisis that Western humanity has undergone through the course of these centuries. Yet this definitive bankruptcy of reason has represented not just the failure of Western man, but today we are also living, in a pathetic manner, the failure of every culture of the past as well as every possible culture of the future. Man can no longer find in the human a foothold and foundation for his existence. If man were to keep leaning heavily on his humanity, this would mean chaos and desolation for the species. This is why the appearance of the Message at this precise moment means the possibility of the

way out of the crisis and confusion we suffer today. As the three friars well note, this Message is an appeal that God is making to men so that they might rediscover and be able to live the Truth glimpsed by some great mystics of the past, and proposed again with all its force and vigor in the Gospel. “... *not only because I find there many precious elements for a spiritual-theological encounter with traditions of the Eastern Churches and with the Reformation theology... but also because in its global vision, it assumed universal religious values and intuitions, from the first of the pre-Socratic philosophical-theological experiences to those of the great cosmic and historical non-Christian religions*” (doc. 14, p.121).

The joint meeting of the four religious with the Father Visitor, requested first in the letter of March 19 and again by each one in the individual visit, takes place at the Milk Grotto on June 16, 1980, after the conclusion of the canonical Visit.

We report some notes taken immediately after the meeting.

Monday, June 16, 1980

The Father Visitor brings out the main difficulty that hinders the realization of our petition, that is, the doubts and the aversion of not a few religious toward the Message, which surfaced during the Visit.

In order to overcome this difficulty, he offers to accede to the petition on condition that this doctrine is not diffused and the name of Señorita Josefina is not mentioned.

The “expedient” proposal is, of course, rejected.

Father Barriuso offers him the three books in Italian: *The “New Earth”*, *“I”*, in *Christ Arisen*, and *A World according to the Heart of God*, so that he can form his own personal idea about the contents of the Message.

The Capitular Congress takes place in early February, 1981. On the 8th of the same month, one day before the Congress closes, the persons concerned are handed the answer reproduced here, followed by their immediate rejoinder.

DOCUMENT 53

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

Jerusalem, February 6, 1981

Rev. Frs. Raffaele Angelisanti
Giuseppe Barriuso
Giuseppe Napoli
Giuseppe Costantin

My dear brothers,

I am informing you that in the Capitular Congress, which is in progress at our St. Saviour's Monastery since January 28th, it has been decided to accede to your repeated requests, permitting you to live together in our affiliate house at the Milk Grotto.

The consent of the Discretorium remains framed within the bounds of our General Constitutions with the specific explicitation of the following points:

1. The fraternity is under the direct dependence of the

Superiors of the Custody, and it will have “someone responsible” who will maintain the contacts with the Father Custos and the Discretorium. The “responsible person”, furthermore, will render an account periodically – or whenever it becomes necessary – of the life of the same fraternity in all its aspects, including the financial aspect.

2. The fraternity will begin on September 1, 1981, and will continue “on an experimental basis” until the next Custodial Chapter.

3. According to Article 84 of the Statutes of the Custody of the Holy Land, it is not permitted to expose to the public, least of all in the Chapel, graphics and drawings that illustrate a spiritual message that is not the one proper to the Shrine.

4. No lay person may be permitted to reside within the confines of the Milk Grotto without written consent of the Discretorium.

5. For receiving foreign and local pilgrims and the Parish faithful who frequent the Milk Grotto for meetings and prayer, a religious of the Community of our Bethlehem monastery shall be assigned.

6. Any changes that anyone might want to make on the premises presently assigned to the fraternity of the Milk Grotto must be submitted to and approved by the Discretorium of the Holy Land.

7. The members of the Milk Grotto fraternity shall abstain from propagating or illustrating theories and doctrines that may give rise to false and harmful interpretations.

8. The Custody will assign to the members of the Milk Grotto fraternity those tasks that it deems compatible with their form of life and according to the gifts that each one has

received from God.

My dear brothers, I am confident that you will receive these provisions with a serene spirit, and that you will make every effort to conform to them. The testimony of your life lived in prayer and in obedience will be the best proof of the justness of the cause that you propose to serve.

I take this favorable opportunity to wish you the best in the Lord.

Most faithfully in St. Francis,

Friar Enrico Furst, O.F.M.

Visitor and President of the Chapter

DOCUMENT 54

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY
Bethlehem

Bethlehem, February 8, 1981

Very Rev. Fr. Enrico Furst
President of the Capitular Congress
Jerusalem

Very Reverend Father,

This morning at 11:30 at the Shrine of the Milk Grotto, in the presence of the discrets of the Holy Land, Fr. Giovanni Battistelli and Fr. Ignacio Pena, we have received from the hands of the Custos, Fr. Ignazio Mancini, the letter of the 6th of this month in which you communicate to us the decision proposed during the course of the Capitular Congress in relation to our petition presented to the former Custos, Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, in our letter of October 30, 1979, turned over to you with our letter of March 19, 1980.

We have read, examined, and discussed together, with deliberation and fully aware of the responsibility that the moment imposes upon us, the content of each one of the eight points by which the realization of our petition is conditioned. With a clear conscience and grieved spirit, we are obliged to inform you that the conditions set are unacceptable because they are in total contrast and opposition to the Spirit that has moved us to make the petition for our undertaking an experience of complete surrender to the Will of God by living – in

all its radicalness – the holy Gospel, essence of the Franciscan life, an aspect which in the answer sent to us is not even touched upon. The incomprehension of our petition is total. The eight points are in sharp opposition to what our conscience presents to us as a duty to pursue, as is clearly expressed in our previous letters – an exigency of conscience that can only be accepted in a vision of faith.

To us the present moment has a crucial importance that can put us in a position of taking a decisive step with unpredictable consequences.

Given the fact that our true spiritual situation is difficult to understand, we think that the problem, as such, cannot be resolved in the light of a collective discussion in which what ultimately holds sway is the anonymity of the majority. The direct superiors have specifically personal responsibilities with regard to the dictates of conscience by which the religious committed to their care feel bound.

We ask that this our position be made known to the members of the Capitular Congress before its close.

Greetings,

José Barriuso
Friar Giuseppe Napoli
Father Raffaele Angelisanti
Friar Giuseppe Costantin

Copy to the Most Rev. Fr. Ignazio Mancini, Custos of the Holy Land. Copy to the Very Rev. Fr. Justo Artaraz, Custodial Vicar.

The same evening, the four religious – in a long conversation, first with the Father Visitor to whom they deliver their rejoinder, and then with the newly-elected Custos, Fr. Ignazio Mancini – come to realize that the conditions set before them at the last moment were not a proposal for discussion, as they had thought, but a definitive decision admitting of no appeal. Thus a grave problem of conscience came to be authoritatively suffocated, and a painful wait of years frustrated in an instant...

It is true that a few days earlier the persons concerned had been called together at the Milk Grotto for a meeting with some of the members of the Discretorium who came to ask for clarifications, but the whole discussion – not at all calm, at that – revolved around the choice of the place where the new fraternity would be formed, giving the impression that the essential issue had, in principle, already been granted.

On the following day the decision of the Capitular Congress is – in another style – confirmed in all its points, and the appeal is renewed that what had been conceded be accepted.

DOCUMENT 55

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

St. Saviour's, February 9, 1981

To the Rev. Frs.
Raffaele Angelisanti
Giuseppe Barriuso
Giacinto Napoli
Giuseppe Costantin

My dear brothers,

With this letter, I reply to yours of the 8th of this month delivered to me by you yourselves after a fraternal dialogue. I presented your letter to the Discretorium of the Holy Land before the close of the Capitular Congress. After further reflection, I am answering you in my capacity as President of the Chapter which is about to close.

First of all, a small note concerning the last lines of your letter, where you declare yourselves against "*the collective discussion in which what ultimately holds sway is the anonymity of the majority*" in matters of conscience, and you desire that the direct superiors assume their "*specifically personal responsibilities*". Such a desire is attainable only up to a certain point because "*in casibus qui vi iuris communis vel harum Constitutionum consensum Definitorii requirunt, Minister provincialis contra eiusdem votum invalide agit*" (General Constitutions, Art. 259.1). By the same token, you also consult among yourselves before answering, and you agree in adjusting your joint letters which in this way also

come to be the result of an anonymity.

But let us enter into the question itself. The Discretorium of the Holy Land and I well understand a certain disappointment on your part due to the fact that your petition was accepted under certain conditions that are not to your liking. We remind you, however, that our responsibility does not concern only the four of you, but all the Friars of the Custody; we are obliged to take into account their viewpoints as well.

We are astonished therefore that you state: *“the conditions set are unacceptable”*. Nor are we convinced even by your reason for rejecting them, that is, that they are *“in total contrast and opposition to the Spirit that has moved us to make the petition...”* If you deem that our points are in total contrast and opposition to the Spirit (with a capital letter!), this is something grave that should terrify us to the marrow of our soul. If instead what is meant is the Holy Spirit who operates in all the faithful, we willingly recognize it in your aspirations to live the Gospel in all its radicalness; but we hope that He will manifest Himself in some way also in our hearts and minds – we who are called to bear the responsibility for you and for so many other brothers. There is always the risk of confusing one’s own selfishness with aspirations of the Spirit; we are fully aware of this, but this applies to you also. *“We carry our treasure in vessels of clay”* (2 Cor 4: 7). Why then such a total, categorical rejection?

I entreat you, therefore, my brothers, to sleep on the matter and to accept our concession as it has been given; it is no small thing and grants you many possibilities. We have said *Yes* to your request; we have approved your project insofar as we have been able to understand it. We have left you free of duties that could take up too much of your time; we wanted to unite you to the place preferred by you in a special type of

fraternity directly dependent on the Discretorium of the Holy Land (while other affiliate houses belong to the closest monastery); and while we deemed that a continuous attending to the Shrine would have been too burdensome for an intense life in common in which communal prayer is of particular importance, we were hoping for a contribution on your part – even though reduced to some strictly religious activity of the Custody (sung vespers, organist service, some contribution on the part of Father Costantin in the catechetical area).

The “conditions” so annoying to you are, for the most part, a reference to the General Constitutions which are the common law for all the friars. The General Constitutions have nothing metaphysical about them, it’s true, but for the time being they have a value and are the general framework within which all the friars must live. Some restrictive points, also aiming at your protection, will be discussed again within two years, in the next Custodial Chapter when your life project will have acquired greater consistency and will be clearer and more conspicuous to all.

You know how St. Francis subjected his friars to obedience not only to God but also to His ministers, and he exhorts: *“Even if the subject should see better things and more useful for his soul than those which the superior orders him, let him sacrifice his own things to God and seek to put into practice those of the superior”* (Admon. 3). I entreat you, therefore, to accept our concession; it gives you ample room for living the Gospel in its radicalness, following in the footsteps of St. Francis as is your intention and my wish.

I greet you fraternally,

Friar Heinrich Furst, O.F.M.
President of the Custodial Chapter

The first reaction is that of Father Costantin who manifests to the new Custos his immediate personal problem as it presents itself in his particular situation of the moment.

The father Custos refuses to accede to his request.

DOCUMENT 56

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY
OF THE ANNUNCIATION
Nazareth – Israel

February 11, 1981

Most Rev. Father Custos Ignazio Mancini,

St. Francis in his Rule asks his friars to direct themselves to their own Minister if they are faced with spiritual difficulties. This is what I wish to do with this writing.

I explained to you orally in the meeting held with you on the evening of last February 8th the grave hardship which I will face having to continue on in Nazareth until September 1, 1981. In this letter, I wish to explain to you my situation and the decision that I have reached.

I presented to the former Custos, Fr. Maurilio Sacchi, on May 7, 1979, a written request in which I asked to leave the Terra Sancta School in order to follow a life more consonant with my Franciscan vocation, and this under the prompting of the Lord. I handed a copy of the letter to the Father Visitor.

Father Maurilio entreated me to be patient until the Custodial Chapter of 1980 because it was difficult to find someone to replace me. It would have been possible, though, after the 1980 Chapter. Since then I have been patient for more than a year and a half. Now I see that even though approving in principle my petition presented together with other confreres, the Capitular Congress leaves me in Nazareth with the same tasks until September 1981.

I must manifest to you that the moment has now arrived for me to initiate a new life in the spirit of St. Francis. I can no longer either procrastinate or bargain with the Lord's call which is clear to me. I can no longer yield or turn back; to do so would be to betray the will of the Lord who invites me to a life closer to the Gospel and to that of St. Francis. To follow this call has become imperative for me, putting aside all scholastic activity, or any other activity in opposition with this vocation. I find myself in the situation of Francis who in the plaza of Assisi, stripping himself of his clothes, symbol of the old man, gives them back to his father in order to place himself naked in the hands of God, initiating the life of the new man.

You, as my direct spiritual father, ought not hinder this call from God but ought to favor it, giving me the possibility of following the voice of God with other confreres, not in the future – within a few months – but in the present with the formation of the new families. My choice is already made; I must obey God. Help me to do it.

What I am asking is in conformity with our Franciscan spirit, with what is happening in other parts of our order – in Canada, for example. It is in conformity with the orientation of the Order expressed in the letter from the General and his Definitorium to all the friars, a letter that presents the priori-

ties of the General Chapter for the six-year period of 1979-85 (cf. *Acta Custodiae Terrae Sanctae*, July-December 1979, no. 2, p. 32).

Under the title “The life of the Friars”, it says:

“We are glad to say that in Narni, besides our communal reflections and deliberations, we have joyfully shared together prayer and meditation on the Gospel. This is in line with the effort on a world scale turned toward the common search for new forms of prayer and contemplation. This search for new forms is part of the reaction against the state of crisis in which the life of prayer has come to be found for many years.” (It is the case of the Custody.) In the fifth paragraph, it says:

“Many new forms of fraternal life can favor the renewal of the authentic Franciscan spirit, they can be better suited to the aspirations of the young friars, and can contribute to clarifying the aspirants’ vocations and their early formation. Therefore, the new government will encourage the various authorities of the Order, at all levels, to accept and appreciate these new forms as something positive to be sustained and introduced into the Order and not to be set aside so that they remain isolated and marginal.”

I therefore fervently ask you not to place me in a difficult situation, saying to me: be patient for yet a few months. In that way, it would be an invitation for me to prefer the Lord’s will over the human will tied to a question of some transfer.

I conclude by repeating what I have already expressed at other times: I mean to remain firmly linked to the Order, to the Custody of the Holy Land, to all my confreres, also to those who seek to impede my request. I do not intend to isolate myself, but to remain in contact with all, lending a

service in whatever I can: catechesis, preaching, etc., so long as it is not in opposition with my fundamental choice.

Sure of finding in you understanding and encouragement, I trust that you will accede to my request.

I greet you fraternally,

Father Giuseppe Costantin

Copy to the Custodial Vicar, Fr. Justo Artaraz. To be shown to the Father Visitor, if necessary.

DOCUMENT 57

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

Jerusalem, February 15, 1981

Rev. Father Giuseppe Costantin, O.F.M.
Monastery of the Annunciation
Nazareth

My dear Father Costantin,

I have the pleasure of answering your letter of February 11th of this year, Permit me to say to you that I have admired the tone of your letter. I am convinced that the Lord calls you to a more intimate life of prayer and union with Him. Many of the things you say to me, I already knew, though not with all the details in your letter. I admit that you have been very patient until now. I am sure that God has been pleased with your patience. Yours is not a procrastinating through indolence; it is not a resisting the voice of the Holy Spirit. All the contrary...

My dear Father Costantin, may I say to you that, despite everything, the Custody has also taken into serious consideration what the Most Rev. Father General, together with his Definitorium, has written in his letter reported in the ACTS, July-December 1979, No. 2, p. 32.

Within a few weeks, my first circular letter to all the friars in which I will deal with the theme of prayer and the interior life will be published. This is an absolute priority, and I will

repeat it in season and out of season. I am sure that you will help me. It seems to me that the Lord has given you this gift.

The decision to leave you in Nazareth until September of 1981 was made in the Capitular Congress – the Very Rev. Father Visitor being present – for various reasons. Meanwhile, as you can see in the list of families, your tasks are lighter and completely in keeping with a life of prayer and contemplation. After September 1st, you will be able to go to the Milk Grotto together with the other confreres who have the same ideals. In the meantime, no one hinders you from placing yourself *“naked in the hands of God, initiating the life of the new man”*. If you would like, you may also intensify your contacts with the members of the future fraternity.

I can assure you that no one seeks to impede your petition anymore (I refer to the authority). The fact of your having to continue in Nazareth for yet another few months will not be, should not be, an obstacle. You know better than I that one can also become holy and live poorly in royal courts and even in the Vatican.

My dear Father Costantin, I entreat you to accept this delay with a serene spirit and to feel already in the new spiritual dimension which you wish to initiate collectively.

When you have the opportunity to come to Jerusalem, I would like you to stop by. Thank you. Asking for your prayers, I greet you fraternally.

Most devoutly in the Lord,
Friar Ignazio Mancini, O.F.M.

What comes next is a reasoned-out exposition of the profound motivations of conscience that underlie the petition, the essence of which is repeated and stressed with utmost clarity in order to eliminate, once for all, the equivocation of the apparent "concession."

The time elapsed since the last communication received from the Father Visitor has given those concerned the possibility of a careful reflection, personal and collective, over what had happened. Only a dispassionate reading of the letter that follows can put one in the position of understanding the true scope and profound value of what is being requested with "obstinate" insistence.

The aim of the attached "Note" is to show the Father Custos what he can do personally, as Custos, and according to the legislation itself, in case he should dissociate himself from the decision of the Discretorium.

DOCUMENT 58

Most Rev. Fr. Ignazio Mancini
Custos of the Holy Land
and Very Rev. Father Discrets

Dear brothers in St. Francis,

With the intent to reflect with utmost calm and objectivity on our situation, we have let a little time pass before manifesting our thought on the last letter of the Visitor and Chapter President, Fr. Heinrich Furst, dated last February 9th,¹ in

which letter the decision of the Capitular Congress concerning us is reconfirmed in all its points, and the pressing invitation is made to us “*to sleep on the matter*” and to accept the concession of the Congress which has approved our project “*insofar as they have been able to understand it*”.

In reality, we seem to have perceived through the letter and in our conversations with some members of the Discretorium the sincere desire, possibly on the part of all, to meet what has been understood as “the essential element” of our petition, and this at the cost of no small sacrifice because of the particularly difficult moment that the Custody is going through. We are grateful for this. In this preference accorded to the demands of the spirit – in spite of the urgent necessities of the various activities that constitute the constant worry of those who have the duty and responsibility to keep the ship afloat – we are glad to see an attitude of true faith, a basic choice on the part of the Custody, perhaps the beginning of a decisive turning point.

But the Lord is always a little bit ahead of all that we human beings can devise and program, however advanced, daring, generous it may appear. God is He who precedes us, and we are called to follow Him. It is He Himself who, snatching us away from our world, from our ideas, from our projects, from our most inveterate habits, and from our most solid and sacred ties, traces out for us the path that a moment before was not there. It is a new creation, an increase of being, a new exodus: “*Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert*” (Is 43:19).

With a heavy heart, we are obliged to repeat that what the Lord is asking of us in this moment – of the four of us and of you – has not been grasped in its true essence and in all its

practical newness, in spite of our written rejoinder of last February 8th and the explanations given orally by each one of us. A regrettable equivocation has arisen over the “concession” that would have been made to “our petition,” an equivocation caused either by a true lack of understanding or by having misplaced the stress, unduly putting it on a particular aspect (“to live at the Milk Grotto”), practical, indeed, and concrete, but secondary, and which by itself loses all its meaning, if uprooted from the reasons adduced and from the form of life envisaged (that “of a free and unconditional surrender to the Will of God above all dependence on the creatures that would bind the conscience”) in which the content of the inner impulse perceived by us as a call from the Lord precisely consists.

To accept the *apparent* concession, as we have been insistently entreated to do, would be equivalent to being unfaithful to an imperative of conscience. The conditions set are not, unfortunately, simply “*annoying*”, “*disappointing*” and “*not to our liking*” as the letter defines them. If it were only a matter of this and the Will of God were not involved, we would be truly glad to submit to them; they would spare us, among other things, an infinite number of other troubles and problems humanly much more serious and unpredictable which only faith and a good dose of unmerited grace can enable us to face. Accepting them would at a single stroke legitimize our position, and we would enjoy the approval and esteem of our superiors and of all those for whom such approval is a sure guarantee and perhaps the only criterion for a positive judgment about our persons and convictions. Let us grant for a moment that these conditions could serve to “*protect us*” from slander and from moral and psychological lynching by the “crowd”..., this, however, could not but be at

the expense of our fidelity to Him whose judgment alone we fear.

The quotation of St. Francis' admonition in the letter is another sign of the lack of understanding of our real problem of conscience. In fact, it is not, in our case, a matter of our "*own things*", opinions, or even spiritually refined interests and tastes, which things we agree ought to be sacrificed for the love of God to "*those*" of the superior, but is precisely a matter of the Will of God made clear and inescapable in a joint coming-to-consciousness, a Will to be preferred to that of the creatures.

A real misunderstanding underlies the authoritative invitation made to us orally with the literal words: "Accept! Once there, do what you want, no one will say anything to you..." as if we had asked to do what *we* want, that is, what we please, and not, at our expense, what God is asking of us. The whole incomprehension stems perhaps from the fact of no one's ever having taken seriously – not even once, even only as a hypothesis – the reality at least subjective of our conviction that it is truly a matter of a call from the Lord.

In order to eliminate, once for all, all ambiguity, perhaps also caused by some not-too-happy expression of ours, there is nothing left for us to do but to repeat and stress with utmost clarity our request and the inner motivations that impel us to make it, in such a way that the Discretorium's acceptance or refusal may explicitly concern the true essence of the problem, leaving no room for doubts or misunderstandings, and may be made by all in full consciousness and responsibility.

Our coming to the consciousness of the Lord's call – culminated in the *joint* decision to follow it *together*, expressed in our letter of October 30, 1979, to the then Custos

Fr. Maurilio Sacchi – goes far beyond our individual aspirations. It has nothing to do with a casual coincidence but presents the marks of an ecclesial phenomenon through the charism of Francis, prepared by the patient and delicate inner workings of grace according to the inscrutable plans of Divine Providence which surpass our personal understanding.

The community of Christians and of every religious institution, like every other society, has given itself a law, establishing and “codifying” the lived experiences – often in an absolute way – into codices of commands and precepts. Given the fact of human limitations accompanied by the relative weaknesses and deficiencies, it is almost inevitable that the greatest intuitions come to be translated into norms of life that, in wanting to clarify and spell out these intuitions, inevitably modify, limit and restrict them.

The original essentially evangelical intuition of Francis – because of the historical situation and the state of consciousness that it has met with since its very first diffusion – once codified has lost much of its genuine and fresh spiritual vigor. This does not mean, however, that the Life revealed to Francis has been absent from the Franciscan movement; this Life has continued to nourish, slowly but inexorably, the tree planted by Francis up to the point of making it flower first and finally bear fruit. We are firmly convinced that the time has arrived in which Christ, availing Himself of Francis once more, wants to harvest such fruits and offer them freely to the whole world, that is, to all men of good will.

And in what does this fruit consist, fruit which in due time Francis presented individually to the Christ and which he now means to present collectively in the name of his Order and of the whole Church? We believe we can express it with the following reflections, consequence of a decisive turn that is

taking place in the human consciousness considered collectively. It is the tree of human evolution which, on yielding its ripe fruit, expresses itself in new relations with God and imposes new relationships among the human beings, whatever category they may belong to. To the human consciousness, the fact is ever-more surfacing that, when it is a matter of relations with God, aroused and animated by the Spirit, a great deal of trust and humility is required if one does not want to fall into the possibility of stifling the Spirit. In this case, every powerholder, if he does not want to see himself deprived of his fundamental mission, has a specific and unique task – that of discerning the action of the Spirit who blows when and where He wishes.

Paul, for having savoured, perhaps more than any other human being, the liberty of the Spirit, has felt and understood the limits and relativity of the law: “*You have been called to liberty, brethren... But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*” (Gal 5:13.18), words painfully lived by the apostle who, in the face of the novelty of Christ, sweeps away a religious world that nevertheless had had its merits and worth. It had had, above all, the merit of preparing the coming of Christ.

The Christian finds in Christ the Life, and liberation from the law and death (Rom 8: 2). Release or liberation from the law, however, does not mean that for the Christian there is no law; it means only that the law has been replaced by a new principle of action, by a dynamism entirely from within that gives one the possibility of liberating one’s self from sin as well, which the law had rendered more evident and manifest (Gal 3: 19).

The exigency of the law – Mosaic and ecclesiastical, both human – which man could in no way observe, constituting

him a sinner, is fulfilled with the new force of the Spirit of Christ who works in the believer; that is to say, the believer becomes capable of “walking according to the Spirit”. It is the law of Love, no longer a norm of action but a dynamic force, new and vital energy that must not be humiliated and vilified by human structures and codes that bind the conscience. *“Walk in the Spirit, and you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh”* (Gal 5: 16). In this new ontological reality, which has no need of any earthly power to recognize and authorize it, is the secret and mystery of the liberation from all external law, liberation which enables one to lead a life perfectly dependent on the Will of God. Sin, then, is no longer seen in its effect as disobedience to a command or precept but is exposed in its roots – that is, the placing of oneself under a principle of action that is not the Spirit but the “flesh”. The Christian who after having been under the law is liberated from it moved by the Spirit, no longer needs a law that exerts external coercion over him because he fulfills all the law in the full liberty of the children of God.

We do not believe we have said new things on a theoretical and universal plane, since all these things form an integral and essential part of the truths revealed to us by Christ and always defended and taught by the Church. Vatican II, for example, recognizes the necessity for listening to the Spirit which enlivens the Church and is continually at work. More than offering detailed norms and laws, which was done later, the Council encourages all the manifestations and expressions aroused by the Spirit.

On the practical and personal plane, on the contrary, we are fully aware of the novelty of our request for “liberty-for-God”, which has all the appearance of going beyond the framework of our General Constitutions. But it is God

Himself who is requesting of the Custody, as He once did for Barnabas and Saul: “*Set them apart for me for the Work to which I have called them*” (Acts 13:2). Perhaps such an act of free donation to God is not foreseen by the “letter” of our legislation, but it is certainly contained in its profound ultimate end which is that of leading the members of the institution to God, of preparing them to dispose themselves interiorly to follow without conditions of any kind the Will of God as soon as it manifests itself.

We personally would probably never have come to formulate such a request by ourselves and, least of all, to sense it as an imperative of conscience, if the Lord had not gratuitously given us a special understanding of the moment that the Church, or rather the entire humanity, is living and of the necessity to choose between what is true, eternal and absolute Will of God and what, on the contrary is only temporal and relative Will of Permission which can no longer be followed, once one has become aware of its nature. By Will of Permission, we understand that God – in order to lead the creature back to Himself freely, in absolute respect for his free choices, even for those choices oriented against Him, and in the patient waiting for his spiritual development – submits His Will to the creature’s liberty; He places Himself at his service. It is clear that when the creature, individually and collectively, comes to a consciousness of this, he must *do* in a way that the situation will become inverted by submitting his own liberty radically and unconditionally – that is, without any longer depending in conscience on the creature’s will – to the Will of God. It is not so much a “moral” choice as a *conversion* of one’s whole being. It is to find a new principle of activity, a new criterion for moral judgment whose measure is no longer human reason but the unsettling exigency of the

Word of God perceived and received in an attitude of ontological faith – as essential openness to the Being – in accordance with the human spirit’s constitutive, original structure which has become conscious and is freely accepted.

This does not mean that one should not be willing to be subjected to any creature according to God’s Will, but this is equivalent to suffering the consequences of an unconditional submission to God – like Jesus who, in order to be faithful to the end to the Father’s Will, and to it alone, subjects himself to the liberty of the creatures even unto suffering his passion and death.

In a static vision of reality, our position might seem like a judgment of devaluation or condemnation of our past life based on our dependence on the creatures through our juridical tie to an institution and to a particular conception of the vow of obedience that seemed to tie our conscience to the will of specific persons considered to be our legitimate superiors through whom God’s Will with respect to us had to be filtered, almost as the ultimate criterion; or it might seem like a condemnation of those who continue to see this as the highroad for arriving at the self-emptying and for knowing the concrete Will of God, God who submits Himself to the creatures and prefers that, in the case of a conflict, the will of the latter be chosen instead of His direct inspirations, which inspirations could be “subjective” and hide or camouflage a very subtle feeling of pride or an exaggerated desire for independence, or could be an illusion or a danger for the entire institution in case it were clearly admitted that each one ought to follow, as the ultimate criterion for action, his own conscience.

All these things we too have believed; we have lived them with enthusiasm and surrender; we had made of them the

highroad for never falling into error. But it has been God Himself who, intervening in our lives in an unexpected and mysterious way, has made us understand that this situation is not the definitive one; it is merely a preparation, a necessary asceticism, until it is clearly understood that it is not God who should submit Himself to the creatures but the creatures to Him. Taking things to their limit, one can come to understand that binding one's own conscience juridically to the will of a creature – person or institution – is equivalent to presuming to serve two masters simultaneously, something declared by Jesus as impossible, especially when one of the two is God, the only absolute Master.

In a dynamic-evolutionary vision of the conscience, that which up to a certain stage of growth is a useful and even necessary means, in the next stage can become an obstacle and cause of death (example: the eggshell; the Mosaic law in the moment lived by the first Christians and particularly felt by Paul). When one arrives at this moment, one cannot in good conscience descend to compromises. Typical of this is Paul's intransigence regarding circumcision, in Galatians 5: 2.4f: *"If you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you... You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness"*. It is a phenomenon of a coming to maturity – a passing from figure to reality.

It should be clear by now that we are not asking to be allowed to try out an "experience", as if our vocation were in crisis and we would want to try other paths... We are not asking for a period of freedom *"on an experimental basis"* with the privilege of dodging duties and responsibilities that burden our other confreres, least of all if the experiment has

to serve to prove to others, through our conduct, “*the justness of the cause we wish to defend*”. We are not asking to leave the Custody in order to enter a stricter or a more relaxed institution. We are not asking for the dispensation of vows as if we had repented of having taken them and would like to turn back; all the contrary: in regard to the vow of obedience, for instance, which is the only one in question, we desire to fulfill its true and profound intentionality which, ever since the early days of our first religious profession, has been a total and irrevocable consecration to God’s Will. We ask only that the true meaning of our particular vocation – which is not a choice but, rather, an answer and an act of faith – be understood by all, or at least by those who feel the burden of responsibility regarding our persons and to whom we are opening our hearts.

To live this vocation at the Milk Grotto was not the essence of our request but only a particular circumstance dictated by the conviction that it was our duty not to take any initiative with respect to a reality that had been born there as a powerful irruption of the Lord in our tranquil lives, well inserted in a system of values and norms approved by all. There was also in this the very human desire (a weakness, perhaps) to remain near our confreres, living the liberty of the children of God (the liberty of the Spirit) in a house of the Custody, in order to feel as little as possible the detachment that the Lord was asking of us, and in order that the life we were beginning to live might continue to form an integral part, like a blossoming, of the organism that until then had borne us along, convinced that the juridical relationship is not the only type of relationship in our Franciscan family but, on the contrary, is only the last skeletal residue of a life that could even slip away altogether.

Your final, definitive answer will make known to us, concretely, what God's Will is with respect to us: whether to follow His call through the way, instinctively desired, of our superior's approval and trust – a path humanly easier but spiritually more risky because of the danger of confusing God's interests with those of men, in case the acceptance were not fully conscious and responsible; or else through the more difficult way of incomprehension and rejection which, however, has the guarantees and the promises of the “narrow way, full of thorns and thistles”, of which the Gospel speaks.

Convinced that the call is not for us alone, we would prefer the first path in spite of the risks. At any rate, as of now we surrender ourselves unconditionally to the Will of the Lord, who continues to pull us out of our “shells” with heart-rending but salutary tugs (“Go *forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your fathers house...*”).

Before taking any step that might go beyond the boundaries of the Custody, we have wanted to exhaust all the possibilities within it, for the sake of tranquility of conscience and out of love for the truth and for our confreres. Fraternal greetings,

José Barriuso
Friar Giuseppe Napoli
Friar Giuseppe Costantin

N.B. The letter lacks the signature of Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti who has actively participated in the preparation of it, sharing all the contents with each one of us. He has had no time to place his signature on the final copy because of his unexpected and forced departure brought about by the sudden worsening of his present state of health, which is due, we are certain of it, only to the wall of incomprehension before

which he has come to find himself. On the other hand, it seems to us that we can no longer put off informing you of this our reply to everything that has been proposed to us.

The example of unyielding fidelity to his own conscience, up to the evident sacrifice of self that Father Raffaele is giving us, is an incentive to us to renew our act of unconditional surrender to the Will of Him who calls us through the ways that He alone knows, in the certainty that, as a loving Father, He knows how to turn all things into good for His children.

Bethlehem, Emmaus, Nazareth, March 22, 1981

DOCUMENT 59

Unofficial note to the Custos, Fr. Ignazio Mancini

1. If the Discretorium should refuse to grant what is being requested *only* because it deems that it does not have the authority or the courage to go beyond the letter of the legislation, the Custos can, on behalf of the Discretorium, request this additional authority from the General.

2. If the Discretorium should refuse its consent *for other reasons*, the Custos, if he *personally* dissociates himself from this refusal, can direct himself personally to the General, manifesting to him his own thinking on the matter and asking him to supply with his authority, according to what is foreseen and provided by the Law itself, for the lack of consent on the part of the Discretorium. If he does not want to do so directly, he can at least *personally* approve our request when we present it to the General.

3. If the Custos identifies himself with the Discretorium in its refusal, we ask that this refusal appear distinctly clear in the reply, without ambiguous terms or tactical delays, so that we, after having exhausted every possibility within the boundaries of the Custody, may take the necessary steps outside of it.

4. We want everything to develop with the greatest serenity and responsibility on the part of each and everyone. Is it necessary to call to mind that in these things one can hardly “*take into account the viewpoints of all*” without repeating Pilate’s attitude?

May we be permitted to unburden our hearts for a moment: with the decision of the Capitular Congress, *official credence* has been given, for the first time, to hearsay and slander. Truth and falsehood have been placed on the same level. There has been a refusal to clarify things so that justice and truth might triumph. Credence has been given, without any proof, to those who threw mud at the Lord’s Message and at those who have believed in it. One cannot please *everyone* when the cause of truth is followed – “*one cannot please God and men*”.

N.B. This memorandum, too, has been prepared and discussed in all its points together with Father Raffaele, whose signature does not appear for the same reasons indicated in our letter to the Discretorium.

José Barriuso
Friar Giuseppe Napoli
Friar Giuseppe Costantin

Sunday, March 22, 1981

Personal Reflections

“At any rate, as of now we surrender ourselves unconditionally to the Will of the Lord, who continues to pull us out of our ‘shells’ with heart-rending but salutary tugs (Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house...)” (p.297).

It is really impossible to understand the attitude of refusal of the Institution to which the three friars belonged when faced with their request of wanting to live the Gospel. From the start, there appears in the three religious priests a transparent and resolute intention to place their liberty unconditionally in the hands of the Being. Why did the Roman Catholic Institution refuse to favorably receive this petition of the three Franciscans? Immediately, an answer strikes me: The Institution, as a consequence of its compromises with the historical, finds itself trapped in the interests of the world. It has sought to make the word of Jesus Christ compatible with temporal interests, and this is what is indicated when we speak of the falseness of the Institution. To have sought to institutionalize the Gospel is of necessity tantamount to betraying it. On the other hand, the three priests, through their encounter with the Message and its bearer, *the slave of the Lord*, had rediscovered that in order to be faithful to the Good News, they were to take it in all seriousness. If what Jesus Christ said is true, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me”* (Jn 14: 6), then our lives are to be lived in complete conformity with the following of this Word.

This is why when the three priests speak of surrendering themselves “*as of now... unconditionally to the Will of the Lord*”, and they do this in a true and concrete way, without subterfuges or palliatives, they are by their fidelity in complete syntony with Francis of Assisi and Jesus of Nazareth: the denial of self in order to fulfill the Will of the Father.

Such a refusal by the Roman Catholic Institution is nothing new. As is known, the Roman Catholic Institution was always on guard before the mystics; let us cite at random some of the most renowned mystics of Christianity: Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Miguel de Molinos – all of them persecuted, mistreated by the Institution. These mystics, like every true mystic, seek an immediate, direct, and personal communication with the Eternal, abiding exclusively by their fidelity to conscience. In addition, the true mystic runs the total existential risk: his self-offering to the Absolute is without reservations. For the mystics, all compromises, deals, vested interests derive from the Satanic. Today history repeats itself once again with this *case of conscience*.

Why this blindness on the part of the Roman Catholic Institution? We repeat: we cannot understand the why of this refusal. In practice, the three friars through the Message were offering the Institution a unique opportunity to regain life, to actually fill that role of spiritual guide of the species which *in theory* the Institution claims to fulfill but, in fact, does not. It is probable that things had to happen as they did. The Roman Catholic Institution has so compromised itself with the world, with the secular, that at this late stage in time it is almost impossible for it to turn back. This is why we can predict the end: the collapse of this two-thousand-year-old Institution.

The long letter is “taken into consideration” by the Discretorium in its meeting of April 23rd.

The depressing reply only reconfirms the decision of the Capitular Congress, deliberately and indolently remaining in the equivocation of the “concession” and reveals once more the attitude of viewing the problem in a one-sided way.

The precise particulars of the “Note” attached to the letter are completely ignored or are not understood.

DOCUMENT 60

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

St. Saviour’s, April 24, 1981

To the Rev. Frs. José Barriuso
Giuseppe Costantin
Giacinto Napoli

Very dear brothers,

Yours of March 22, 1981, has been taken into consideration by the Discretorium of the Holy Land in its meeting of April 23rd of this year.

All, unanimously, are of the opinion to uphold the decision already given by the Custodial Congress in which the Very Rev. Fr. Enrico Furst was present in his capacity as President. This decision is not a refusal but a concession framed within

our General Constitutions which are the common law of the society to which we belong.

As for the Father Custos, I repeat what the President of the Congress already wrote you, quoting Article 259, paragraph 1, of our General Constitutions: *“in casibus qui vi iuris communis vel harum Constitutionum consensum Definitorii requirunt, Minister provincialis contra eiusdem votum invalide agit.”*

I entreat you to accept the decision of the Capitular Congress. It gives you the possibility of living the Gospel in all its radicalness, and of imitating St. Francis according to the possibilities the Holy Spirit gives to each.

With my best fraternal wishes and in the Easter joy of the Risen Jesus,

Most devoutly in the Lord,

Friar Ignazio Mancini, O.F.M.
Custos of the Holy Land

After this reply, we find ourselves in a deadlock. The absence of Father Angelisanti, who for reason of health remained in Italy from March 21st to October 9th, prevented the other three religious from proceeding beyond the joint letter of March 22nd (doc. 58, p.289), by which, in any case, all that was to be said had already been said. On the other hand, the date of September 1st, fixed by the Capitular Congress as the beginning of the eventual Milk Grotto fraternity, was still far off, and one could not exclude the possibility – though it would have been extremely improbable – that in the meantime the matter might be taken up again.

It is the Father Custos who takes the initiative with a letter addressed separately to the three religious who have the same first name.

They answer jointly, which answer is only a referral to their clarification of March 22nd, because of the ambiguity of the question contained in the Custos' letter.

DOCUMENT 61

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

St. Saviour's July 24, 1981

Dear Father Giuseppe,

I would like to know if you still intend to go to the Milk Grotto, in the early part of September, for a spiritual experience.

This was requested of the Venerable Discretorium in due course and dealt with in the Capitular Congress of February 1981.

Awaiting a reply, I greet you fraternally,

Fr. Ignazio Mancini, O.F.M.
Custos of the Holy Land

DOCUMENT 62

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

St. Saviour's, July 24, 1981

Dear Father Giuseppe,

I would like to know if you still intend to go to the Milk Grotto, in the early part of September, for a spiritual experience.

This was requested of the Venerable Discretorium in due

course and dealt with in the Capitular Congress of February 1981.

Awaiting a reply, I greet you fraternally,

Fr. Ignazio Mancini, O.F.M.
Custos of the Holy Land

DOCUMENT 63

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND

St. Saviour's, July 24, 1981

Dear Father Giuseppe,

I would like to know if you still intend to go to the Milk Grotto, in the early part of September, for a spiritual experience.

This was requested of the Venerable Discretorium in due course and dealt with in the Capitular Congress of February 1981.

Awaiting a reply, I greet you fraternally,

Fr. Ignazio Mancini, O.F.M.
Custos of the Holy Land

DOCUMENT 64

Most Rev. Fr. Ignazio Mancini
Custos of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

Most Reverend Father,

The question contained in your letter of last July 24th, by which you ask us separately if each one of us still has the intention of going to the Milk Grotto in the early part of September, completely ignores, such as it is formulated, the clarification that Father Raffaele and the three of us have endeavored to give in our letter of March 22, 1981. Whichever answer we might give, affirmative or negative, would now turn out to be ambiguous if that clarification of ours is not taken into serious consideration, clarification which had the purpose of getting across what we are really asking for, and which now seems to us useless to repeat with other words.

On our part, we are firmly determined to follow what appears ever more clearly to us as not only a personal aspiration painfully lived, but above all a concrete invitation of the grace we do not want to fail to respond to.

We have confidence in the fulfillment of the Lord's promise that the reality of a spiritual order of which He has let us have a glimpse – a reality that in conscience we are not allowed to renounce, nor do we want to do so – will in any case have its development, and this “*within or without the Custody of the Holy Land*” (cf. Letter “To the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land”, dated August 31, 1977). Let no one think that we are indifferent to this alternative. We are not being “cocky”. On the contrary, we sense it as the “cross”

on which we must perhaps die.

Know that we, with great trepidation, mean to truly place our liberty in the hands of God. We hope only that He will let us know more clearly the concrete path we are to follow.

Once again, we ask that you, at least, might understand us and might help us not to fail in this already ineludible imperative of conscience, rather than making it more difficult for us and putting us in jeopardy of being unfaithful to it.

Fraternally,

José Barriuso
Friar Giuseppe Napoli
Friar Giuseppe Costantin

Bethlehem, Emmaus, Nazareth, August 4, 1981

In order that the chronicle may be complete, we reproduce in this documentation some diary pages in which Father Napoli has set down a colloquy he had with the Custos, Fr. Ignazio Mancini.

It is one of the many conversations had by the four, jointly or individually, with the two Custos who have had to deal with this delicate matter, and with the Father Visitor. To the contrary, there has almost never been a direct contact with the other members of the various Discretoriums.

Wednesday, 19 August 1981

A few days ago, the Father Custos called me, and today I have had a long colloquy with him.

I show up close to noontime, more than anything else to make an appointment, but he immediately lets me into his office and asks me to tell him in a few words whether or not we intend to go to the Milk Grotto on the 1st of September, because, he says, our reply of August 4th¹ does not express our thinking with clarity and simplicity, but is only a referral to our previous letter.

I bring to his attention the fact that our effort at clarification having been completely ignored, we could not answer with a simple *yes* or *no*: a *yes* would have implied our acceptance of the conditions set forth; a *no* could have meant that we were renouncing our request.

The atmosphere is heated. I tell him that we have lost confidence in words because everything we say or write is either not understood or is misinterpreted.

He answers that he, too, has lost confidence in our written word because, he says, our letters are “obscure and cryptic”. In the fact, then, that we stubbornly persist in always writing “together”, he says he clearly sees a concern on our part to impede or hide the backing down of any of us. He adds that it would be better if each one of us would write on his own behalf; if we coincide, it will be seen by the content of the letters.

I answer him that there is a much more profound motive for writing together, and it is the meaning that our joint coming-to-consciousness, made concrete in a joint request, has for us. This collective petition cannot be reduced to a simple personal problem which the superiors would easily resolve or wipe out according to each one’s particular situation, completely changing its meaning. There is also, I add, another motive: the spiritual need to live together in order to be able to grow in the Life we have discovered. By now, we have been kicked out from everywhere...we are obliged to meet in the street... but our meetings are moments of light, of grace, of joy, as certainly no one can imagine... and it is from these moments that we live. Our heart is elsewhere, not in the place where each one of us lives, suffering alone...

It is already time for lunch. We interrupt our conversation, but I bring to his attention that the matter is very serious and requires more time. He invites me to call on him as often as I wish; but I prefer to set an appointment for three o’clock in the afternoon.

In our afternoon conversation, which lasted an hour and a

quarter, the atmosphere is much more relaxed. After a few moments of embarrassing silence, he begins with a witty remark, but I quickly bring him back to a serious tone which we succeed in maintaining up to the end, keeping the conversation from falling into trivialities and at the same time from descending to useless polemics. It turned out to be an impassioned confrontation of ideas and positions which, though painfully lived by both, especially by me, went far beyond our persons... I am glad to have found myself on the side that it has been my lot to represent, but I almost tremble when I recall all the grave and self-committing words that flowed from my mouth and which, although reflecting my most profound convictions, are far above my poor human reality. I do not think I can reproduce, not even remotely, the tone and expressions of the dialogue. What I am writing is only some vague indications of its content.

He begins by repeating the question regarding our intentions of going or not going to the Milk Grotto. Now that I have the time to make all the distinctions in order to avoid misunderstandings, I tell him that, under the conditions that have been set for us, we will not go; let them do with it whatever they please, it's not our property ... But let it be known by all – and here I long insist – that by this we in no way renounce what our request precisely consists in, that is to say, the necessary liberty for a life of total surrender to the Will of God.

He says that our matter has taken up a good part of the Capitular Congress and that all were concerned about resolving it in order not to have troubles afterwards, but they have wanted to make it fit into the framework of the General Constitutions. At any rate, he adds, they have been very understanding in leaving us free from duties; they have not

done so in order to humiliate us but to meet our desires...

I tell him that we have understood this very well and have acknowledged their good will in our letter of March 22nd.

He confronts me with the usual objection (not easy to refute) that doing God's Will is, first of all, an interior attitude that can be realized in the place and in the circumstances in which one finds oneself... Who is stopping you, he says, from living poorly and detached, and from observing the other virtues in the place that has been assigned to you under obedience?

I answer that it is not always so, as is attested by our own experience of the religious vocation, when as children we felt called by God to leave our families, our environment... I ask him what he thinks of one who would have advised St. Francis to live the ideal he was perceiving as an impelling call from the Lord by continuing as a merchant in the house of his father, Pietro Bernardone, perhaps even under the pretext that he would have had better possibilities for doing good works and aiding the needy... And then, is not God's voice in the Bible a continuous invitation to come out from our own shells ("Go forth from your country, etc.")?

He insists, saying that we could, in effect, accept the conditions set without making it a question of conscience... in practice, we would have been free... and then, for the saints, the true liberty of spirit consists in living out of love what is required by the laws... he reminds me of St. Francis' submission to the Church...

I ask him to put in brackets for a moment the usual moral and ascetical schemes in which we think sanctity consists... there is nothing saintly about us, I tell him, we know it all too well; it is only a matter of faith, and faith is not a virtue of

ours, a human perfection that may be considered one's own it is, rather, the recognition of our radical insufficiency, a consciousness of one's own poverty... I add. I would have much to say about the intuition of St. Francis and how, in my opinion, he did not submit himself to anyone in what he perceived to be for him the Will of God, even though – it not being in his power to force the mass of recalcitrant friars to follow him – he has allowed things to go their way, he himself withdrawing... Having understood “through revelation” that “living the Gospel” was anything but “becoming a religious” by entering one of the Orders of his time, he carefully guarded against following the authoritative advice of those who were unable to see anything more perfect... At any rate, I conclude, I am not resorting to anyone as example, not even to St. Francis himself, for I do not intend to demonstrate a thousand disputable things... the example of Christ is enough for me.

The liberty we are asking for, I explain to him, is not a liberty “de facto”, the kind of liberty, for example, that I already enjoyed in Jaffa where I could really do what I pleased..., but a liberty “de jure”; it is a question of principle, and we cannot descend to compromises. On the other hand, it is not a matter of the “easy” liberty that would be obtained with the dispensation of vows or with a secularization decree that would break all our ties with the Order, and which would be reduced to an individual “solution” without meaning. We want to be free for God while remaining Franciscans... It is something altogether original that perhaps finds no comparison anywhere in the Church today. But it is something new and unheard-of only if compared with the “status quo” presently existing – with the forms that we human beings have given ourselves; it is not at all new if compared with the

exigency of Biblical revelation from the first page to the last.

He listens in silence, but one can see that he is not convinced. Vigorously, he throws in my face our “intransigence”, especially mine. We do not want to yield in anything...we have made it a question of principle...we absolutize too much...

I answer that the term “intransigence” better suits their attitude. As for us, it is rather a matter of “fidelity to conscience”, which we cannot play around with.

He rejoins that his is not intransigence but “prudence”.

A tight skirmish begins over the life of “liberty” or of unconditional surrender to the Will of God which we intend to undertake. He says it is impossible to be part of a society (in this case the Custody) and live in this way... On the other hand, it would be something that cannot last, as is demonstrated by some examples of the past and by the beginnings of Franciscanism itself... What will happen, for example, when people who no longer have its spirit begin to form part of our “group”?

I explain to him that the problem arises when the group or society gives itself a juridical configuration; only in this case can one “juridically” form part of the group without having its spirit, with all the painful consequences that we well know... But we are not an institution; we are nothing... the phrase “to form part of our group” makes no sense if its spirit is not shared...

He objects that what we are asking for goes beyond the Constitutions.

I answer him by distinguishing between the letter of the law and its spirit... I strive to make him understand the difference

between “vital relationship” and “juridical relationship”, demonstrating that the first can subsist without the second. I give him the example of family ties; I narrate with many details the experience of my religious vocation: my father, aloof from the faith and instinctively distrustful of the ecclesiastical world, had the strength to sacrifice me to the Lord, despite the fact that I was his only male child, solely on the basis of his respect for my conscience and liberty. The only words that came forth from his mouth when at the age of twelve I tremulously asked him to allow me to leave in order to follow the call of the Lord, were: “You must follow your path... you are free... I cannot hold you...” Eleven years later, he was saying: “You are a priest..., I have consummated the sacrifice...” The apparent separation from my father – the fact that I was no longer at his disposal – has not meant a break; rather, it has tremendously deepened our relationship... Something similar, I conclude, is what we expect today from our new family which is the Custody: suspension of the juridical ties without breaking the spiritual ties. I remind him of the example of the primitive Church which “renounces” Barnabas and Saul in order to offer them “as a gift” to the Spirit who reserves them for Himself, for the Work to which He has destined them... emphasizing the special meaning that this verse had for us when we thought of quoting it in one of our letters. I have the impression that the comparison does not displease him.

I continue for a while on the same tone with reflections that I do not now remember. It seems he has nothing more to answer, but at one point, pulling himself together, he says that I am “a metaphysician...”, that the argumentation is too subtle, that it barely holds up, that it almost gets to be convincing... but that the reality is something else. ..

I answer that if by metaphysician he means something that coincides with faith, as it has been for me, I accept it; in me, I tell him, the inner light shone forth when I succeeded in making the two worlds that divided me coincide – the world of philosophy and the world of faith. If, on the contrary, he means quibbler, rationalist, and philosopher in a pejorative sense, I reject it altogether, because here it deals with a very, very concrete attitude of faith.

He again attacks our “sophisticated” letters...

I retort in a fiery manner that we have written those letters with our blood... We have done everything in order to render intelligible, acceptable, “reasonable” what, instead, because of its being pure faith, cannot but go beyond the criteria of “reason”. This perhaps has been our mistake. I know well, I tell him, that on the basis of “reason” any affirmation can be criticized and contradicted, and that one could go on arguing from here to eternity, both sides repeating the same things over and over again... One of you has already said that “we are on two parallel lines, and it is now useless to continue talking”.

He concurs... I then cut it short and take him to another plane. There is only one problem, I tell him, do you or do you not believe that for us it is a matter of a true conviction and of an imperative of conscience in which we cannot fail without feeling gravely responsible? Do you personally believe it, yes or no? Or do you think rather that we are playing around with the word conscience?

Yes, he says, I believe it, but it is a “deformed, false” conscience; it cannot be the way you say... And he again cites the saints.

I ask him to go slow with certain categorical affirmations.

We have sufficient elements for believing that we are not mistaken but we don't believe we're infallible... But if we are mistaken, the one responsible for this is God Himself who has placed us before this problem of conscience, and He cannot fail to intervene as He did with Abraham ... I ask him what he would do if he were in my place.

He is quite taken by surprise, then replies: "No, I couldn't be in your place; I couldn't have this conscience. . .,"

I share a personal confidence with him about my recent understanding of the faith, speaking to him – I tell him – not as my superior but rather as "between friends or former friends". He listens with more and more interest, now and then insisting with nostalgic regret that, in substance, we could have accepted the conditions that had been set for us...Why don't we, he says, accept that one of us be responsible for us? What impedes us from keeping an administration account book to present to the responsible persons of the Custody, even though we do not want to receive anything from them?...

At a certain point, he seems to begin to yield. In short, he asks, how should we answer? Simply say that we grant you permission to live according to conscience? But shouldn't we all live according to conscience? What exactly is your petition? Could you repeat it?

I tell him that in our letters we have, in general, synthesized it as a request for permission to live in a total, unconditional surrender to the Will of God, which is equivalent to a life of pure faith.

He asks: "Only this? Without our having to add anything more?"

We think for a while and find absolutely nothing to add.

Any addition, I bring out to him, would be placing conditions on God...

What seems to be an insurmountable mountain can at one stroke be reduced to a most simple thing: it is enough to answer *yes*. For us, I tell him, it's a question of faith and conscience; for you, it's simply a matter of believing in the sincerity of our affirmation and of respecting our conscience.

He listens without answering. Then I let myself get carried away by inspiration, and fiery words pour forth from my mouth, words which I am utterly incapable of repeating: Do we really believe God?...the living God?...the One who is capable of creating new unheard-of things? the One who, when He intervenes, casts to the winds all our structures? Why do we have the presumption to think His action should fit into our narrow mental schemes? Why do we not trust Him? When will we really place our liberty at His disposal? He "puts up with us", submitting Himself to all our decisions...

There are a few moments of intense silence. Then he exclaims, almost as if talking to himself: "But this life is not of this earth..." and immediately adds with a smile: "But then, neither is the Gospel of this earth..."

The only result of this colloquy has been that, when the deadline of the first of September finally came around, our "renouncement" of the Milk Grotto was made public knowledge...

Personal Reflections

“I answer him that there is a much more profound motive for writing together, and it is the meaning that our joint coming-to-consciousness, made concrete in a joint request, has for us” (p. 309).

The call of the Being through this Message is not to be taken up in isolation, as separate individuals. It is rather the real possibility for this disclosure of the Being in man to take place collectively as a simultaneous event. This awakening can irrupt in an entire family, in a group of people who formerly were sheltered in an institution, or also in many people simultaneously but separately. The historical situation in which the species is living today is highly propitious for the disclosure of a collective coming-to-consciousness of the Being. What has been traditional within mysticism is the individual coming-to-consciousness. *A Case of Conscience* is a living example of how this *total, unconditional* and *direct* surrender to the Being takes place simultaneously in the three religions. The friars, as we have already noted, left the Custody of the Holy Land and joined the *collectivity* that has formed around the Message and *the slave of the Lord*. Those of us who have had the opportunity of living together in this *collectivity* have been able to verify that this coming-to-consciousness is occurring in children, adolescents, young people and adults alike. It is a truly extraordinary event to witness how some adolescents, for example, possess such a profundity and clarity, such a total and lucid coming-to-

consciousness. This indicates to us that the awakening of the Being in various individual consciences simultaneously is actually possible.

VOICE IN THE DESERT

Documents 65-69

The five letters that follow, from October 29th to November 8th, express, each in its own way and in the most personal tones, the last attempt of each one to cry out his own problem of conscience in order to be at least believed and taken seriously, if not understood.

The personal declarations manifest the presence of a new individual state of consciousness capable of getting each one to assume his own personal responsibilities.

DOCUMENT 65

Emmaus, October 29, 1981

Most Rev. Fr. Ignazio Mancini
Custos of the Holy Land
and Very Rev. Fr. Discrets

Dear Brothers,

Our decision to send me to Mount Tabor to be part of the religious family there gives me the immediate opportunity to address you again, this time individually, in order to repeat and stress the same unalterable request which for almost three years now I have been reiterating orally or in writing, alone or with other confreres, and which up to now has not been heard; rather, with the last decision it seems to have been altogether filed away.

As I have said orally to the Father Custos, it is not so much the transfer itself that creates a problem for me, even though

the new “exile” in the least accessible place of the region has – if confronted with the spiritual need that I had always expressed – all the characteristics of a growing repressive measure, almost as if the long waiting period had had nothing less than the power to turn the terms of the problem upside down unto exacting a worsening of the “penalty” ... My real problem – that which my conscience does not permit me – is acquiescence to a pretended “solution” that may mean – even though dictated by a small dose of comprehension – the liquidation of my fundamental request which is already an answer to what the Lord has made me understand to be His Will for me and which I do not intend to nor can I renounce.

When I presented my resignation from my position as principal of the Jaffa School, it was not to ask for a transfer or a change of position, as I pointed out in my letter to the Discretorium, dated March 19, 1979, but precisely to begin “*a new life-experience...in perfect consonance with the Franciscan ideal*”, even though at that moment I did not yet clearly see, as I said orally to the then Custos, Father Maurilio Sacchi, what concrete form it would take.

The Discretorium relieved me from my position for the spiritual reasons presented by me, and the Custos, in communicating this to me in his letter of May 6, 1979, which I herewith enclose, did not fail to give me his “*best wishes for every good*” for the new life I was about to undertake.

Later on, my vocation became clearer in the decision made with three other confreres to live together a form of evangelical life of unconditional availability to God’s Will beyond all human support of any kind, according to what we together had understood, perceiving it as a special call from the Lord. The Custos to whom we had presented the petition advised us, for the purpose of bringing our desire to a successful

outcome, to wait for the Father Visitor whose visit was imminent, asking us “to wait patiently and with trust, each one in his own monastery”. I was assigned to Emmaus with the sole purpose of *waiting* for our petition to be discussed, which petition remained unknown to all the others until the Capitular Congress was held.

The few months’ wait has been drawn out for two long years, first because of the unforeseen delay of the Chapter, then because of the intransigence of the new Discretorium and its stubborn refusal to take the matter into serious consideration. My isolation in Emmaus – far removed from the confreres who share my convictions and aspirations – has been particularly trying for various reasons which I leave to your intuition and sensibility to guess. With the passing of time, it seems that my situation is no longer, in the minds of some Discrets, that of one who has in principle obtained the authorization to carry out a spiritual experience, even though afterwards he has been hindered from realizing it, but of one who is in a state of obstinate insubordination and should always be grateful to everyone if nothing worse happens to him. This position of the superiors has, of course, conditioned and continues to condition the opinion of many others. The image of the “loafer” has been intentionally created as if I, being in Emmaus, had already achieved my purpose and had not in reality been hindered from giving a positive content to my “experience” by dedicating myself with all my enthusiasm and energy to the “one necessary thing”, the only one that can now fill my life and which, in conscience, I cannot renounce. Each day gone by has indeed increased the suffering, but it has not had the power to lessen the impulse, the need of my spirit, nor has it dissipated the motives and profound convictions that are at the base of my request.

This letter is not meant to be a sterile, bitter letting-off-steam by one who seeks to pose as a victim, but yet one more attempt to get those to reflect who are not the *absolute* masters of the lives and consciences of their confreres just because they have received a temporary commission of service in the bosom of the community, but who do have the precise duty to foster the realization of what God asks of each in the innermost of his conscience according to the basic principle – which seems to be growing dim in the minds of many – that *the institution is at the service of man and man at the service of God* and not the other way around.

From what has been said thus far, it is evident that I can accept the new destination only by remaining in an attitude of suspension and expectation, a difficult position for me and for the others, but the only one, unfortunately, that in the circumstances imposed upon me is consonant with my conscience which requires me not to fail in what God is asking of me.

The obedience promised by me to the superiors of the Order, which has been first of all a total and irrevocable consecration to God and not a simple juridical contract with the authorities of the Franciscan institution, contains an exception already contemplated in our Rule itself: to obey in everything except “*in that which goes against the soul or against the Rule*” or form of life wanted by Francis which is the Gospel. Against my soul, in this moment, would be not to follow the voice of God who is calling me with such clarity to undertake *a form of life of direct, total, and unconditional surrender to His Will without tying my conscience to any creature*, but at the same time without breaking the spiritual and vital ties with my Franciscan family.

This is not a “seeking the cover of the institution”, as someone has insinuated, but a rediscovering in the bosom of

the Franciscan fraternity a more profound tie than the juridical one, with the painful desire not to break it. Can a Franciscan, as a Franciscan and while remaining one, follow the call of the Lord freely and above every condition set by men? Here is the problem. I am personally convinced that this is indeed the deepest meaning of Franciscan poverty and of obedience correctly understood.

As for the authenticity of my coming-to-consciousness which I dare to define as a “call from the Lord”, I deem it useless in this letter to descend to arguments or clarifications in order to render it rationally intelligible, although these would not be lacking. For me, it has the ineffable nature of an act of faith (luminous, not blind faith); on your part, perhaps all that is needed is an attitude of respect for the conscience, which is the place where the voice of God becomes present.

Fraternal greetings,

Father Giuseppe Napoli

DOCUMENT 66

TERRA SANCTA MONASTERY OF THE ANNUNCIATION

Nazareth – Israel

October 29, 1981

Most Rev. Father Custos
Fr. Ignazio Mancini and
Rev. Fr. Discrets of the Holy Land

Peace and Good!

On Sunday, October 25, 1981, I returned to Nazareth after having spent almost three months in Tiberias substituting for Father Pietro Tomé, recently returned from his vacation.

This absence from Nazareth, which I did not seek but which was arranged by Father Tomé with Father Gennaro and afterwards with the consent of the Father Guardian, has been very useful for me in many ways. It has freed me, among other things, from the illusion of the usefulness of my presence in Nazareth and has allowed me to experience to a certain extent a life of poverty. This period of time has helped me above all to reflect over my spiritual situation after the various and repeated requests presented orally and in writing to those responsible for us in order to initiate together with other confreres a Franciscan form of life in the Holy Land, explained in the different letters, which seemed to us, and still seems to be a clear invitation from the Lord.

I summarize this form of life in these terms: to live the Word of God in its radicality, entirely and unconditionally surrendering ourselves to His Will in all that concerns our spiritual and material life and our relationships with others. Removing ourselves from the will of the creatures, we acknowledge, concretely and with our lives, that He alone is the Lord.

This call from the Lord is for me still valid and impelling even if to my human eyes it entails risks and the leap into the “void”. If it is He who calls me, I have full confidence that He will give me the strength to follow His invitation.

The Father Custos in a letter dated July 24, 1981, sent separately to each one of the three “Giuseppes”, asked: *“if you still intend to go to the Milk Grotto, in the early part of September, for a spiritual experience “*. Fr. Raffaele Angelisanti was then in Italy, and I in Tiberias. In due course, we answered the Father Custos in a joint letter dated August 4, 1981, that: *“On our part, we are firmly determined to follow what appears ever more clearly to us as not only a personal aspiration painfully lived, but above all a concrete invitation of the grace we do not want to fail to respond to”*.

Today on my return to Nazareth after an absence of three months, I can by no means continue to live as before, even having been liberated from responsibilities in order to dedicate myself to an apostolic activity. At this time, I feel it my duty to give a personal answer to the aforementioned letter from the Father Custos, in addition to the joint answer which retains all its value, making known my spiritual situation. My request, expressed orally and in the various joint letters, was not that I be liberated from obligations and responsibilities in order to dedicate myself to a certain activity, however spiritual and apostolic it might be. Invita-

tions of this kind are not lacking from various parts and different territories. My request is essentially a request for life as the Lord has slowly and progressively made me understand it, and not for activity – without excluding this. Without this form of life, I feel condemned to death, and this in addition to the immense difficulty of our being able to meet, scattered as we are in remote places.

The form of life to which I feel called is the one I have mentioned above: “to live the Word of God fully by surrendering myself entirely to His Will in everything”.

This is the invitation that the Virgin Mary of Nazareth extends to me today – Mary who by her absolute “FIAT” has made possible the incarnation of the Word.

This is the invitation that Francis extends to me today, he who, invited by the Lord to follow Him, surrendered himself entirely to His Will, expressing this with the words: “*The Lord Himself revealed to me what I had to do*”.

The Lord invites me to carry out this form of life together with other confreres here in the Holy Land, where my Christian and Franciscan vocation has matured. I believe that all of this has a special significance in the eyes of the Lord.

I am aware of the difficulties that this request entails – for you, but above all for us who are to live it. Is it not perhaps the moment for us all to make a humble act of faith in the One who can do all things?

My only attitude at this time is that of a total abandonment to God without paying too much attention to or dwelling on my poor capabilities.

After having tried to disclose sincerely and with all simplicity the form of life to which I feel called by the Lord, I ask

that you offer me the possibility to carry it out together with the other three confreres, in order to respond positively to the Lord's invitation.

Greetings in Christ.

Friar G. Costantin

DOCUMENT 67

Most Rev. Fr. Custos Ignazio Mancini
and Very Rev. Fr. Discrets of the Holy Land

Dear brothers,

The present letter, in addition to being a personal reaffirmation of everything written previously together with other confreres, intends to express to you the internal state in which I presently find myself. Such a state is fruit of a long and slow inner evolution that, initiated with cognitive and affective exigencies, has terminated in the realm of conscience understood as the intuiting of Someone who has overturned my life.

The goal to which this evolution has taken me does not entail my repudiating anything of the past, but it requires me to continue the path according to a new dimension about which I know nothing. One thing alone presents itself to me with all clarity: the inner necessity to place my liberty in direct and total dependence on God's Will. Acting in this way, it could be thought that I am retracting my Franciscan vocation. I don't believe this. I am convinced that the one who has accompanied me on this path has been Francis, the saint whose life of unconditional and absolute response to God's call I have always not only admired but also loved. His life also – unto his complete identification with the Master – constituted, for the majority of his contemporaries, a disconcerting and incomprehensible fact.

What I am living is not a phenomenon of just the last few years. More or less explicitly, this has always been connected

with my vocation to the Franciscan religious life. I began to become aware of it, though in a very confused manner, during my minor seminary years; I experienced it more explicitly in the novitiate. After the distracting parenthesis of the war of 1940-1945,¹ I felt it more profoundly during my theological studies and in a very special way on the occasion of my priestly ordination. I always had it before me when I was a master of clerics and during the long period of my teaching of philosophy. Through my experience of miseries, weaknesses, and defects, I have always sought its solution in my conscientious fulfillment of the duties entrusted to me under Obedience and in my unconditional submission to and acceptance of the laws of the Church and of the Order. What is the conclusion? The tension within me has been increasing more and more. In these last few years then, there has been surfacing to my consciousness in an ever clearer and more binding way, a new world, difficult to understand and to define.

The following reflections and considerations on some Scriptural passages offer you the possibility and opportunity to grasp something of this delicate problem, both human and spiritual.

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it” (Mt 10: 34-39) With such affirmations, so disconcerting and difficult to

accept I believe the Lord means to say this: that which in any way becomes opposed to or conflicts with man's true *regeneration* must be put aside even if it is a matter of our loved ones and our most precious things. Once one has mysteriously received the grace of having come to consciousness of the "new Life" to be realized *in Christ and with Christ* everything else must disappear, everything else must die: "*Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit. He who loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world, keeps it unto life everlasting*" (Jn 12: 14-25).

The word of God is life and life everlasting. The world does not and cannot see it, but those who are "His own" see it fully well. Jesus continues to speak through the Gospel, and many believe in his word, but they do not confess it "*for fear of the pharisees*", fearing to be excluded from their "society", and this happens because the glory of men is cherished more than the glory of God. Others, on the contrary, do not believe in His word because what interests them is their own glory and not the glory of God. "*How can you believe who receive glory from one another, and do not seek glory which is from the only God*" (Jn 5: 44).

Concerning the request formulated above, I believe that the authority conferred to the Superiors has the same scope as that which the Lord gave to Peter and the other Apostles so that they might solve, according to conscience, the problems of the souls entrusted to them. They can *prohibit* or *permit* only that which is strictly connected with the attainment of the Kingdom of Heaven. But in spite of this, Jesus, the only true Master, always continues to be the One who is, before God, the real representative of His people – He, the cornerstone upon which He is building His Church. The exercise of the

authority conferred to His ministers is linked to a great responsibility connected with and dependent on a life lived in intimate union with the Christ. One may not, in fact, “bind” what must be “loosed”, and one may not “loose” what must be “bound”. The call to participate in the “administration” of the kingdom of Heaven does, indeed, confer the authority necessary to direct its people, but this doesn’t mean that Jesus, delegating such authority, has tied His own hands and can no longer “administer” His kingdom personally, because each soul is chosen and fashioned by Him alone according to the particular place a soul must occupy in His Father’s Work, the Church. We have an explicit example of this in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter and the others, after having prayed, draw lots over who should take the place of Judas, and the lot falls to Matthias, but the Lord chooses Paul on the road to Damascus. Truly mysterious are the ways of the Lord!

I am fully aware of the gravity of the request made and am frightened by the consequences that might derive from it. Humanly speaking, I feel an absolute incapacity to bring to fulfillment what I am asking. I am comforted only by what the apostle Paul wrote to his faithful in Ephesus: *“For the rest, brethren, be strengthened in the Lord and in the might of his power. Put on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the Principalities and the Powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness on high. Therefore take up the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and stand in all things perfect. Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breast-plate of justice, and having your feet shod with the readiness of the gospel of peace, in all things taking up the shield of*

faith, with which you may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, that is, the word of God. With all prayer and supplication pray at all times in the Spirit, and therein be vigilant in all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Eph 6: 10-18).

I ask you to attentively examine the request in the light of the faith brought to us by the Christ, and not in the light of simple reason. May the Lord illumine you and me regarding what He wants from each one of us individually in this present grave hour which the whole of humanity is going through.

Affectionate greetings in St. Francis.

Friar Raffaele Angelisanti, O.F.M.

Bethlehem, 2 November 1981

DOCUMENT 68

Bethlehem, November 8, 1981

Most Rev. Father Custos Ignazio Mancini
and Discrets of the Holy Land
Jerusalem

Most esteemed in the Lord,

I am writing this letter with regard to the petition presented to the Custodial Congress of 1980, signed by four religious belonging to the Custody of the Holy Land, in which it is requested:

that freedom to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel in direct and unconditional submission to the Will of God be recognized.

The petition has not been considered according to what was requested in it. Since the reasons that moved me to sign it still hold, I feel obliged in conscience to renew it, personally insisting with all the energy I can muster.

I could close this letter right here, since on this subject we have written as a group many times. Nevertheless, I take the liberty to call your attention again to the fact – which I consider decisive – that what is being requested is completely in accord with that which constitutes the supreme Franciscan aspiration, and which with the very same words is contained in the Scriptures.

It is said in Psalm 40: *“Behold I come; in the roll of the book – referring to all Scripture – it is written of me: To do*

thy will, O my God” (Ps. 40: 8-9). This is precisely what is requested. St. Paul’s rereading of this same passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews makes explicit and clarifies the motivations that justify this conclusion, fundamental for the understanding of existence, and having universal value.

After having described with the words “*shadow*” and “*image*” of the “*good things to come*” and “*not the true reality of things*” all that which is included in the Law or born of it – institutions, rites, observances, cult, etc. – incapable of liberating because God does not accept any of this, he says, reaffirming the Psalm, in order to establish the absoluteness of the Will, “*He abolishes the first in order to establish the second*” (Heb 10: 9).

By “*the first*” he means the whole make-up of Jewish religious life centered on the Law and the Temple. By this, one has to understand, too, everything that has come to replace it, that is, Church precepts, observances, cult, institutions, etc., although on another plane but still on the level of “*shadow*” and “*figure*” of the true realities that are to come. It follows, as the psalmist’s consciousness already perceived it, that “*to do God’s Will*” is the only thing that can save: “*It is in this ‘will’ that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*” (Heb 10: 10). By sanctifying, he means, according to the genuine Biblical sense, to sever from the world of the profane, to liberate from the submission to the creatures in order to enter the domain of the holy.

St. Paul’s teaching is quite clear and if he, moved by the Holy Spirit, directed it to Christians in his day, it is valid for us as well. I must confess that, although this has been in the deposit of faith since Christianity’s first steps, it has not always been something alive for me, in my Christian experi-

ence. It is something of which I have become conscious – more keenly each day – through an evolution.

We are not, then, free. We are, as St. Paul likes to say: *“slaves to the elements of the world”* (Gal 4: 9). But not everyone bears in mind this existential reality: that we are submitted to the creatures. For the reasons adduced by St. Paul, we are not in reality free until we have been liberated, and the only thing that can liberate us is the fulfillment of God’s Will. Someone with whom I was speaking about the necessity to be liberated in order to attain the liberty necessary for fulfilling God’s Will, answered me at once: *“I, I’m free.”* He was forgetting in that moment what Jesus answered some of the Jews who also claimed they were free and had never been slaves to anyone: *“Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin “* (Jn 8: 34). And St. John in a letter says: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us”* (I Jn 1: 8). We have been liberated, it is true, *“but we know that all creation groans and travails in pain until now. And not only it, but we ourselves also who have the first fruits of the Spirit – we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. For in hope were we saved”* (Rom 8: 22-24). When the Jews were at the foot of Mount Sinai, on their way to liberty, they said to Moses: *“You speak to us, and we will listen, but let not God speak to us, or we shall die “* (Ex 20: 19). For fear of dying, by their own choice they submitted themselves to the creatures – in this case to Moses – a creature sent by God to lead them toward liberation, but a creature nonetheless.

Jesus said to us: *“If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For he who would save his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake will find it”* (Mt 16: 24-25). With these

words, He was inviting us to die, and was telling us of the absolute necessity of dying in order to reach liberty. But we have not wanted to die either – as the Jews did not – in order to be able to live in this world.

The Jews, as a consequence, immediately said to Aaron: *“Come, make us a god who will go before us”* (Ex 32: 1). Aaron, in order to fashion it, asked them for what was most precious to them – gold and jewels; he poured this into a mold and presented it to them, and they said: *“Here is your God, Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”* (Ex 32: 4).

We Christians have done exactly the same thing. We have offered “Aaron” the best that we have so that he might fashion the image of our God requested by us as our protector, who could go before us, in a way that the necessity to die might not present itself as being so peremptory.

St. Stephen, presenting this episode in two moments and drawing from it a lesson that is valid for the situation after Moses and after Jesus Christ – that is to say, for us – says: *“God turned away from them and abandoned them to the worship of the army of heaven”* (Acts 7: 42). Because of our choice – because of our not wanting to die – once again we have remained under the creatures.

Some have become aware of this universal situation of slavery and have believed that man, in an act of total self-donation – placing himself unconditionally in the hands of a creature – could reach liberty. This has been done with the greatest longing and as the maximum sacrifice of self that man can make in order to go to God. This is how we have understood what we call obedience. This is what I have done. Freely and consciously, I took this path because I thought that this was the most direct, fastest, and surest way to go to God.

And I do not regret it, nor do I censure or repudiate it. In reality, my desire to go to God has not given me liberation; rather, it has led me – in the rites and formulas in which this desire has been acted out – to place my liberty in the hands of the creatures, subjecting myself to them, in an irrevocable manner, as a concrete path for me to go to God.

Since God respects, above everything else, the liberty of His free creatures, and it is we who in the exercise of our liberty have given ourselves this path for going to Him, until we come to the consciousness of the need for a conversion from the creatures to God – a conversion in which our liberty orients itself totally and absolutely to Him alone – He cannot intervene, precisely because He respects above all things our liberty. This is the story of all those who have come to a consciousness of the universal state of slavery in which we find ourselves and who have wanted to reach liberation on their own.

Am I speaking against the religious life? In no way. I have been in it since I was sixteen, and I repeat that I do not regret it, nor do I seek to break with it; I seek only its true realization – the passing from the image to the reality.

Those men who have most desired to seek God and to give their all without reserve have again found themselves under the creatures, be it for the noblest of motives. Couldn't this be what Jesus was talking about when he used to say to the Pharisees, who also represented in the Jewish world a particular class of persons most strictly committed to God's path: "*You traverse sea and land to make one convert; and when he has become one, you make him twofold more a son of 'hell than yourselves'*" (Mt 23: 15)? Is it, then, that this has had no value? It has, indeed, but it cannot work out anyone's liberation: "*Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but*

a body hast thou prepared for me” (Heb 10: 5), with which it is being said that they have, indeed, had a value.

The slave and captive here is the “Man”, subjected to the Unconsciousness and a prisoner; it is the true Reality-Man who waits to be liberated; it is the Son of God, the true and genuine Israel, who must be liberated, and in Him all those who are Israel.

How is it that Israel in the unconsciousness of the multiplicity continues to be a captive? Jesus Christ would have been “the Promise” for the Jews of that time, but they did not recognize Him as Messiah because they did not follow, as their fathers did, the way of faith but the way of reason, and this is why they delivered Him up to the Gentiles to be crucified by them. The Messiah they were expecting was delivered up by the Jews themselves into the “*hands of the sinners*” (what the Gentiles were to them), and He is still in the hands of the sinners. With Him, the “people of God” passed on to “Babylon”; “Christ”, the ONLY BEGOTTEN of God the Father – the same genuine “Israel” of that time – is still in captivity and waits to be liberated by the “new Moses” whom the Father’s Justice will send.

The liberation, then, of the human being from the submission to the creatures under which he finds himself can only come to him from an encounter with Christ, with His word. This is why Christ is the Promise.

It is true that the “Christian people” had to go along the same path that the “Jewish people” had traveled with respect to the fulfillment of the Law, so that through ecclesiastical Law and Precepts – as God’s commandment for us – we might come to know sin and confess ourselves guilty before God, and on not being able on our own to fulfill the Law, we

might recognize ourselves as helpless and might search in our hearts for Christ, “*fulfillment of the Law*”, because “*the Law never brought anything to perfection and, on the other hand, we have the introduction of a better hope*” (Heb 7: 19).

The “second coming of the Lord” could have happened immediately, since humanity was to be found in the fullness of its theological evolution – the “third Time-period” – and not like the past generation of Israel whose lot was to live the moment of the “exodus”, and even after. The apostles of Jesus were living in expectation of the “Lord’s coming”, and they believed it imminent, according to the promise. And so it would have been if we Christians had responded by *living the Gospel* – the word of Jesus Christ, life of those who believe in it. For just as Jesus Christ lives by the word of the Father, so also will all the rest of us live by the word of the Son, Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 5: 25-27; 12: 47-50; 15: 1-2); so that if the “second coming” of the Lord is depending on the fact that the *Gospel be lived*, in the moment in which this is carried out and we are living it in a total faith, according to the promise, the Lord will come.

If we keep in mind the Apostles’ certainty of the imminence of the “second coming of the Lord” linked to the *living of the Gospel*, the appearance of Francis in the history of humanity takes on a special significance. It is the first time after Christ that a voice is raised as a call to live the Gospel, saying: “*It has been revealed to me that I must live according to the form of the Holy Gospel*”. The *form* of the Holy Gospel is the Will of the Father: “*I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me*” (Jn 6: 38).

Francis was advised that in order to satisfy his eagerness to surrender to God, he should enter one of the then existing Orders. Francis could not do this. And it was not because of

a moral judgment on persons or institutions, but because he saw, in the clarity that had emerged in his consciousness through the Lord's light, that all this, because it was work of the creatures, was itself a creature, and it subjected one to creatures instead of liberating from them, impeding in this way the possibility of living according to the "form" of the Holy Gospel, the Will of God.

I confess that there was a time in which this language of Francis', when he speaks of a revelation for living according to the form of the Holy Gospel, was displeasing to me, and it seemed to me to be inexact and naive since, I told myself, haven't we all been enjoined to live the Gospel? I didn't understand it until the Lord gave me the understanding. Today I'm convinced that no one to whom the Lord does not reveal it can come to understand it.

Now could St. Francis – having reached the state of consciousness in which it is understood that only the Will can liberate and sanctify, and that in the fulfillment of this Will consists the living according to the form of the Holy Gospel – take the initiative to found any new institution in order to live the Gospel. His consciousness of the radical incapacity of all creatures to transmit the life of the Gospel prevented him from doing so. History may perhaps be able to disprove the validity of this affirmation – even with documents; it seems even possible to me, but what history may be able to prove to the contrary is certainly outside the "spirit" of Francis. This was Francis' torment in the last years of his life, and this has been the on-going drama of all those who throughout eight centuries have continued to ask themselves: What does it mean to live the Gospel? In what form is it to be lived? The only answer – and there can be no other – is that of Francis. It is given in words that history has been unable to record, but

not for this does Francis' answer cease to be fully authentic: *“My children, I gave you a Rule, yes, and though I did not mean to give you any other Rule than the Gospel of my Lord, yet in what I have done there may also be much error. Therefore I say to you, my children: LIVE THE PURE GOSPEL, and you will give me rest”*.

I have attempted to express how I understand the subjection to creatures under which we all find ourselves and how necessary the “liberty” is in order to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel – the Will of God – which manifests itself as the “Good News”, Word of Life, for the Word of Jesus Christ is life for those who believe in it;

This is the request which I renew once more with this letter.

I wish you all the best in the Lord.

José Barriuso

DOCUMENT 69

Bethlehem,
November 8, 1981

Most Rev. Father Custos
Fr. Ignazio Mancini
Jerusalem

Most Reverend Father,

I am writing you in an entirely personal and private way, endeavoring to do this in a completely informal manner, with all the naturalness and spontaneity with which at times, in our casual meetings, we would reflect together; I believe that, in reality, those conversations were true meditations.

I write this letter overwhelmed by a feeling of sorrow and disappointment. It is in regard to the petition made by four of us religious, all of whom Your Paternity knows very well and which petition has not been taken into consideration.

In those moments I am referring to, it would have been difficult to imagine the situation that has come about and in which we presently find ourselves. At that time, the openness to all the possibilities that might mean a step forward seemed real to me. Now that I thought that the time of ripening and harvesting had arrived, everything turns out just the opposite; the time for carrying things through having arrived, everything has changed. I wouldn't know how to give myself an answer; nor do I want to look for one, for fear of incurring the danger of offending, though only through simple questioning, or even for fear of coming upon some surprise.

At present, everything gives the impression that the problem that originated with our request is considered resolved. It seems that Your Paternity, with your “savoir faire”, between authoritative and imperious at times, and understanding and conciliatory at others – as those who know how to lead persons and groups – has liquidated or, at least, hushed up everything without noise or scandal. That four persons are then reduced to silence, without a dispassionate, calm and unbiased examination together with them on the meaning of what they are requesting, this is unimportant. Perhaps this can draw the approval of many; be taken as a sign of a special skillfulness; and be recorded as an outstanding deed in the annals of services to and the leading of a collectivity. As for me, I must tell you with all sincerity, it represents the obstacle that the “establishment” always – and here once again – places in the way of advancement. It is one more impediment to be overcome on the pathway of evolution and, in substance, is one more attempt – which always has the same origin and purpose – to stifle the opening-up of the conscience to new horizons, one more among the already innumerable attempts to suppress the liberty that are recorded by history. I would not speak to you with so much frankness if I did not know, through our aforementioned conversations, how Your Paternity thinks.

I have heard you say after the situation changed¹ (who knows if as an excuse for self-justification) that you have to keep the others in mind, too. This justification – “the others” – used so vaguely for designating a state of impersonal opinion is, rather, an evasion in order to avoid responsibility, since this term “the others”, so impersonal in itself, has more force in the imagination than in reality. It generally comes from very low levels or from gossip because it does not

accept open confrontation, or it comes from the vagueness of collective irresponsibility because Your Paternity knows better than I what the actual level of our communities is wont to be. We agree and tolerate each other on a level of a simple get-together in a place – with smoke, liquor, cookies, television, all of it, as is easy to see, on a sensory level. What is done on a spiritual level – as when we meet for vocal prayer – hardly has any influence in our lives because it is done in a pre-established manner. And should it be these “others”, whose voice goes forth and remains on such levels, who are to intimidate us with their shouts and paralyze all initiative?

In this state of affairs, one might ask oneself: What value can St. Paul’s earnest admonition to the Thessalonians possibly have when, among other things and warnings, he says, “*Do not extinguish the Spirit*” (1 Thes 5: 19)? Either we take the Word of God in its entirety or we pay no heed to it, for to take only what is to our convenience in order to affirm the authority of some over others does not seem right to me. As to what follows in the same text: “*But test all things; holdfast that which is good*” (*ibid.*), if one is persuaded that the Spirit can ultimately speak only through the authority – as one of the replies given by the Capitular Congress and signed by the Visitor would seemingly have us believe – then the situation is clear and there is no possibility whatsoever for appealing or insisting. But it seems to me that if the unity of the Spirit is kept in mind, as is seen by St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians in Chapter 12, all the members have a mission to fulfill – which is always a manifestation of the unity of the Spirit.

On the other hand, when it is a question of religious matters, there is a kind of tacit consensus that whatever the adopted attitude may be – above all if it is the authority – no

responsibility is incurred. Furthermore, it is somehow recognized unanimously that there is almost a duty to oppose everything that does not initially come through the authority. The reasons on which this false opinion is based are many. They mainly justify this opinion on a light and superficial reading of Gamaliel's famous advice in the Sanhedrin, which they simplify, taking one of his statements, and they conclude without further ado: "If the case on hand is work of God, it will triumph", without worrying in the least whether by their conduct they are unjustly oppressing or abusing the Spirit in others. "If it is of God", they seem to tell themselves, "God must intervene and will intervene", in this way tempting God, asking Him for a spectacular intervention. For such as these, God's approval or Will has to be confirmed by success. How many pages of history would have to be re-read!

Forgotten and confused is the fact that success is not precisely the seal of God's works. God respects the liberty of those free creatures of His who, out of justice, have a say-so in matters, and He awaits the exercise of their liberty. Until all Justice is fulfilled, He waits; and if they become opposed, not for this does He bypass their liberty. The Work of God, despite all the oppositions and obstacles, will be brought to a completion by Him, even if it has to be through other paths. To these, as to those Jews who asked Jesus for a sign in order to believe, He, in apparent failure – for the encouragement of some in their faith and the confusion of others in their lack of faith – is answering: "*No sign shall be given them but the sign of Jonas*" (cf. Mt 16: 4).

Gamaliel does not say, "block their way as much as you can, hinder them by all means", but to the contrary: "*Keep away from these men and let them alone. For if this plan or work is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you*

will not be able to overthrow it. Else perhaps – he adds – you may find yourselves fighting even against God” (Acts 5: 38-39).

For lack of both faith and fear of God, they do not heed the danger Gamaliel warned against as the greatest one they should avoid. They do not want to bear in mind that *“it is a terrible thing to bar the way of those who are fulfilling God’s Will. It is sufficient that a soul believe in conscience that he is doing what God is asking of him, so that another who stands in his way simply to impede this, will in justice receive the ‘reproach’ of God”*. Of this, there is a very eloquent example in the Bible:

“Samuel said to Saul: ‘It was I the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel. Now, therefore, listen to the message of the Lord. This is what the Lord of hosts has to say: I will punish what Amalek did to Israel when he barred his way as he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has...” (1 Sam 15: 1-3).

Amalek in the eyes of God represents *“the spirit of iniquity; God orders Saul to utterly destroy all that belongs to Amalek’s kingdom, and to declare it anathema. Amalek, then, represents the prince of this world with all his works opposed to the Work of God”* (cf. *Pere-grinación del Pueblo de Dios – Explicación de los Grabados*, p. 105).

It can be seen that those latter members of the Sanhedrin still had some fear of God, because they accepted Gamaliel’s advice and left the Apostles free, although not without first having unjustly mistreated and abused them, but without asking or expecting – on that occasion at least – an intervention by God in confirmation of what the Apostles preached.

I have deliberately run the risk of giving the impression of having gone off the subject. But isn't this the situation? I have taken the liberty to do so, even though our situation is different, availing myself of our former relationship of many years which I have mentioned above. My boldness is due to a new and more profound coming-to-consciousness that has happened in me. I have spoken of it in all my letters, attempting to make it known to you. How did this happen? If anyone knows the process, it is Your Paternity, for the same reason that makes this frank conversation possible. The concurrence of different forces and circumstances has prepared it, and the Lord has done it. I could repeat, as something realized in me to the letter, what the Psalm says: *"You have granted him his hearts desire, not denied him what his lips entreated. For you have met him with choicest blessings"* (Ps 21: 3-4). Do you not remember how we often spoke – because of the specific work we were both in – of the necessity for a "pilgrimage" theology as an answer to the spiritual need we saw in the pilgrims? The Lord has given it in a form that we could not imagine, or even dream. It is tangible. How can it be that this is not seen or perceived? Or rather, I do indeed believe that it has been perceived, since transmitting this knowledge to pilgrims has been forbidden. It would not strike me strange if some day, in one form or another, the liberty to transmit the authentic Word of God were kept under effective control, as has been done with the one that has been sent to us.

The state of consciousness about which we have repeatedly spoken and have tried to make known to you [you and the Discretorium] is summarized, in my opinion, in Psalm 39 (40). I can assure you, Father Custos, that I am living it, and the enthusiasm with which the psalmist expresses himself in the proclamation of the truth that the Lord in His mercy is

making known to him cheers me.

I am willing to run every risk for the sake of following all that presents itself to my conscience as God's Will. Nor am I seeking a "privileged situation", the protector of false or real aspirations of a spiritual nature. Neither am I seeking a "break" with anything or anyone. In the light of the consciousness I have come to, about which I have often spoken to you, I see that the chick which after twenty-one days under the hen does not break the eggshell, dies. If the institution represents the eggshell for us, the only thing I ask is that it open up without a rupture or violence – as the bud makes way for the flower and the flower for the fruit, so that the fruit may appear on the tree. I understand that the eggshell for us is the juridical bonds in which the institution is crystallized. The juridical bonds can be neither the only nor the prevalent frame of reference for human relationships. They can and must be surpassed by the only bond that is no longer image and shadow of the good things to come, of the true reality of things, but is the true reality: charity "*which is the bond of perfection*" (Col 3: 14), "*for the Law never brought anything to perfection and, on the other hand, we have the introduction of a better hope*" (Heb 7: 19).

Forgive me, Father Custos, but I had to say all this to you, for I cannot believe that, with the change of positions in the group within which we are both going toward the goal, convictions could have changed so quickly.

I greet you attentively, wishing you all the best in the Lord.

José Barriuso

P.S. My eyesight continues to be quite deficient. I can write, with much difficulty, thanks to the size of the letters on

the keyboard. My limitations are very great, for I cannot read either. I can make out something short with the help of a magnifying glass. The space and range of my life are thus reduced to limits I had never imagined. It is a conscious experience of the way toward the “Nothingness”, because of my gradual limitation. Seen in this way, it seems to me extremely positive, and I am living it as a singular grace from God.

I am including an Italian translation of the letter to Your Paternity and the Discretorium so that it may be better understood by all.

These our last letters have fallen into the void. For the first time, no answer has been received, no reaction – infallible sign of total refusal.

This sign has had the power to spark in us a new coming-to-consciousness: all our possibilities having been exhausted, we no longer have any human hope left of obtaining a consent – the consent and support of our superiors for which we had been struggling for several years; it is not a matter of insisting any longer; perhaps we have not even the right to do so; neither is it right for us to make judgments in advance, to think that it is a matter of stubbornness; perhaps it is the problem itself that transcends the persons involved; perhaps that which to us appears to be a call from the Lord that goes beyond the constituted order and which has the characteristics of an explosion of consciousness, of a direct intervention by God, of a new creation, is not so except for those who, altogether gratuitously, have had this opening-up of consciousness; it is therefore not right to wrench a consent from those who have not arrived at such a consciousness; it is not right to discharge on others the responsibility of our leap into the void, thus escaping the judgment of men, under the covering of the authorization received.

The time has come for us to assume personally and with serenity the full responsibility of our act of “obedience to God rather than men”.

IX

**THE LEAP INTO THE VOID
BEYOND THE INSTITUTION**

Document 70: Public Declaration

Document 71: Farewell Letter

With the two letters that conclude the present documentation on our “case of conscience”, we have communicated to our confreres the concrete decision that each one of us has reached in conformity with the exigencies of his own conscience.

The meaning and scope of the decision are sufficiently clarified by the entire documentation.

DOCUMENT 70

To all the Friars of the Custody of the Holy Land and to all those whom it may concern: Peace and Good!

“And Jesus went his way” (Lk 4: 30). So that we may not let the life in us die away, it is necessary to keep on going, to follow the way that our Lord points out to us.

The contacts between me and the Discretorium of the Holy Land have come to a “deadlock”, since I haven’t received any answer to my last letter of October 29, 1981. Can I accept such a “deadlock” situation without betraying what has appeared to me to be an evident call from the Lord? This call, manifested to me and to the other three confreres through different paths and which led us to a joint coming-to-consciousness of what the Lord was asking of us, has been a slow and progressive maturing of our “early Franciscan vocation”.

We have expressed this “new call” in the joint petition of October 30, 1979, and have tried to explain it, insofar as possible, in the various joint and personal letters and in several contacts we have had with the persons responsible. But we have come to be on two “parallel lines”, as a member of the Discretorium has defined it. We don’t blame anyone for it. Perhaps this is due to the very nature of the situation or of that which appears to us as “an invitation from the Lord”. Each one is to assume his own responsibility before the Lord. As far as I am concerned, I feel the responsibility not to fail His Word. To this Word, I endeavor to conform my Franciscan “being” and my doing. What I “will do” in the future will only be a consequence of this profound conviction. To judge me and the other three confreres outside of this light and these principles would be to distort the truth.

The documentation regarding our problem, which has been made public, is an attempt to explain and clarify the situation and the facts from our point of view.

I have now come to an important and vital turning point. As it appears from the documentation, we – the four religious who sign it – have, through different paths, found ourselves in agreement on some fundamental points of our Christian and Franciscan vocation. In total respect for each other’s conscience, each one will follow the path the Lord shows him. I – without denying any of the principles expressed jointly and individually, as it appears in the documentation, what is more, in conformity with them and in the diversity of our paths – do not personally feel, for now, that I ought to take the step that my other three confreres are taking. I am living the moment of waiting for the “Will of the Lord” to manifest itself, like Paul who, cast to the ground and blinded by the appearance of the Lord on the road to Damascus, waits

– praying and fasting in the desert of Arabia – that his eyes may be opened.

What I am writing is an attempt to explain a delicate situation in which our persons and our consciences are involved – the four of us who sign the documentation. I ask only to be understood in the light of the faith and of the conscience to which Francis refers in his message to Brother Leo: *“Whatever may seem to you the best way for pleasing the Lord God and for following in His footsteps and His poverty, take it up with the blessing of the Lord God and my permission”*.

I greet you in St. Francis,

Acre, March 24, 1982

Friar Giuseppe Costantin

DOCUMENT 71

Jerusalem, April 9, 1982

To the Custos, Fr. Ignazio Mancini
and to all the Franciscan Friars
of the Custody of the Holy Land

Very dear brothers,

We believe that the moment has come to inform you about an event that, for us the undersigned, takes on a decisive significance for the rest of our lives as persons consecrated to the realization of the good news of the Gospel.

After long meditation and prayerful reflection on our inner exigency for liberty in order to depend only on the Will of God, as we have repeatedly made known to our superiors orally and in writing, and after having exhausted all means for obtaining their understanding, we feel obliged in conscience to take on our own initiative the step that we would have liked to have taken with the approval or at least the assent of our superiors.

In deciding to take this step, we consciously assume all the responsibility of our decision, trusting that the Lord will not let us fall into error, since we are not moved by any motive other than fidelity to our conscience: to consecrate ourselves directly – without the mediation of any creature – and totally to His Will as a continuation of our religious and priestly consecration to the evangelical and Franciscan ideal.

We inform you, therefore, that by the time you receive this

letter, we will have already moved to a house that the Lord has provided for this purpose in order to live together with the persons with whom we were sharing our experience in the house at the Milk Grotto.

We do not renounce nor do we repudiate – in any way – our religious Franciscan vocation which we will live more intensely depending only on the Will of God.

We do not renounce nor do we repudiate our vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity; on the contrary, with our obedience to a profound exigency of conscience, we confirm them by submitting ourselves unconditionally to the Will of God so that they may be at His disposal and not at the disposal of ourselves or of other creatures.

We would not want the step we are taking today – moved only by the desire to be faithful to an inner exigency that obligates us in conscience before our very selves, before God, and before men – to be a motive for separation from our brothers who in the same righteousness of conscience remain at the service of this same Will through the superiors, being dependent on the Institutional Authority as we too have been up to now. We hope, rather, that in our new state, which demands from us a greater fidelity to our vocation, we may be able to offer, besides our personal and direct donation to God, the fruits of our sacrifices for the benefit of all.

Along with this letter, we are sending the documentation that makes up the history of how we have arrived at this coming-to-consciousness and this individual and collective decision so that all of the Franciscans of the Holy Land may know the truth of the facts and be able to form an opinion as personal as possible of the events.

The current eighth centennial of the birth of the Seraphic

Father Francis offers us the opportunity to present to all, without distinction, our fraternal greetings united to the Franciscan wish so profoundly evangelical of Peace and Good in Christ the Lord.

José Barriuso
Raffaele Angelisanti
Giuseppe Napoli

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We have arrived at the end of the drama enacted between José Barriuso, Raffaele Angelisanti and Giuseppe Napoli on one side, and the Custody of the Holy Land on the other. Once more we want to stress the importance of this event. Let not the reader take leave of this book without first re-considering the great significance of this *case of conscience*. The objective that has guided me to compose this work has been to issue a *call* to the man of today to come to the full consciousness of his historical and spiritual reality. The species is coming to the culminating hour of its evolution, the hour of the awakening of its consciousness. What is presented to us as a real possibility for our lives is the most spectacular thing man ever dreamed: to be able to live our concrete lives in direct relationship with the Absolute, with the Being.

Today more than ever, Parmenides' famous saying gains force: "*It is of the entity to be*", and the no less famous one of Heraclitus: "*Indeed, everything comes to be an entity in conformity with and by virtue of this Logos*". After an oblivion of twenty-five centuries, the teaching of these pre-Socratics acquires full relevance for our day. And it is starting with the re-proposing of the question of the Being, as it has been done in this Message, that we are offered the real opportunity to unify the teaching of the great Masters. Jesus Christ, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Parmenides appear to us, the men of today, as our authentic, genuine guides. In the face of conclusive evidence of the total failure of the human as the essential identification of man, there's only one thing left for

us to do – to resort to the teaching of these great Masters: the leap into the void in order to attain the “New Earth”.

A Case of Conscience is a living, present-day example of how the attitude of three Franciscan religious of the Custody of the Holy Land was moved by the voice of their conscience, and how the three were led to separate themselves from the Institution to which they belonged after they rediscovered the Gospel – fulfillment of the Will of the Father – and the message of Francis of Assisi through their encounter with the *Message* and the person who receives it. This coming-to-consciousness, at this late stage in time, represents for man the real possibility of living the Gospel and the Mosaic Law, of making a life of that which for so many centuries has been dead letter. This coming-to-consciousness represents a call, urgent and imperative, to all the men of today, without distinctions of race or social condition, for them to decide to place and surrender their lives into the hands of the Being. This surrender into the hands of the Being is the last opportunity being offered to man so that, rejecting the Evil One – his identification with the ego – he may return to the primordial house of the Father. One should note, as a deplorable fact, the hidden and the open opposition of the religious Institution to which the three friars belonged when they presented their petition to be granted “liberty” in order to live the Gospel, to fulfill the Will of God. This coming-to-consciousness of the three religious priests is a denunciation of the way the representatives of the Institution prefer to remain in the ego, the human, the convenience, and they do not decide, following the example of Jesus Christ, to leap into the void – to live their lives in an exclusive surrender to the Will of the Father.

A Case of Conscience tells us that the hour has come in which we are to make the most definitive resolve of our lives,

that is, to abandon every kind of establishment, for “... *the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head*”. While we are under the shelter of any institution, ideas, beliefs, aims that restrict our liberty, we will be impeded from encountering the Truth. The only legitimate house in which man should live is *out-in-the-open*; of course, not just physically but, above all, spiritually. This being *out-in-the-open* is the perfect liberty. It is only in the void, in the absence of all entitative holds, where God will be able to draw near to us.

The attitude of the friars was, at all times, an invitation to the Institution to which they belonged to be receptive to the Message. They spared no efforts so that the rediscovery that had taken place in them – what they subsequently called *A Case of Conscience* – might be truly understood. In principle, the Institution could have listened to the call to dispose itself to live the pure Gospel, submission to the Will of God, and because it has been the representative of the word of Jesus Christ for two thousand years, such receptivity to all that might mean a real and sincere identification with the Gospel would have been perfectly understandable. That is to say, from a *doctrinal* point of view, the Institution should have welcomed with great jubilation the three Franciscans’ request for “liberty”; it should have rejoiced over the petition of the friars since its real mission is to prepare religious and believers in general for this coming-to-consciousness of the unrestricted surrender to the Will of the Father, as was done by Jesus Christ: this is the true mission of the Catholic Ecclesiastical Institution. However, as one gathers from the documentation with which the reader is already familiar, the attitude of the Institution was one of refusal, one of hostility.

With its attitude of refusal, the Institution was interpreting its role from a juridical angle, that is, it wanted to maintain

the criterion of authority, extending it even to what is specifically spiritual. This closing itself to the exigencies of the spirit denotes a position that speaks for itself: giving primacy to the world in the face of the true Essence of man. From the moment that the Institution becomes jealous of its authority in matters pertaining to the spirit, it is appropriating the liberty of man, thus impeding the possibility par excellence of the human entity, that of surrendering himself directly to the Being.

Everything that means deviating the human entity from his realization in the Being, who is his true Essence, is an attack against Man himself; it is being unfaithful to the Gospel. This is being Antichrist, which means a state of consciousness opposed to the Christ state, giving preeminence to the ego, to the human, to the convenience.

Indeed, the history of the Roman Catholic Institution shows us all too well how it has distorted its role as mediator, inasmuch as what it has done is to interpose itself between man and God, so much so that many of the black pages of this Institution arise from its stubborn interference in man's direct relationship with God; and all this comes about because of its seeking to sacralize the Institution, whereas what must be sacralized is man himself: *"For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are"* (1 Cor 3: 17).

Instead of actually taking on its role as faithful follower of the word of Jesus Christ, the truth is that the Institution has acted just like the tempter angel, seeking to usurp the place of God in man; and this attitude of spiritual pride is what has become entified as Satan, since this is the satanic: to obstruct the most sublime possibility of man, that of being able to say as Jesus Christ said, *"The Father and I are one"*.

It is well to stress and drive home the fact that the Roman Catholic Institution does not represent Jesus Christ. The Christ it offers us does not motivate the believer to deny himself, but just the opposite. The permanence in the world of this two-thousand-year-old “institutional church” is not, as is thought, a guarantee of its divine origin and of the permanent assistance of the Spirit promised by Jesus Christ, but is, rather, a more than evident proof of its identification with the spirit of the world. This identification has been ever-growing, up to the present day. For having allowed itself to be ensnared by the spirit of the world, the Roman Catholic Institution has gradually moved away from the Spirit of Christ, and at this late stage in time it can be said that it now belongs to the world. The Christ of the institutional church is a god equal to the god venerated in the cults of the historical religions, a god, as Feuerbach would say, “*made in the image and likeness of man*”, a protector of the ego. To make Jesus Christ the object of adoration in order to strengthen one’s ego – getting the ego out of its difficult straits, solving its problems – this “Jesus Christ” is, rather, the living image of the Antichrist: “*All this I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me*” (Mt 4: 9). What the living Jesus Christ, the true Jesus Christ, the authentic Jesus Christ asks of us is the denial of self, which means that the only genuine way to “adore” Christ is by sacrificing our ego, breaking the ties that bind us to other entities and, above all, breaking the attachment to ourselves: “*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself*” (Mt 16:24).

Christ is not an entity that exists independently of us but, rather, a state of consciousness – the Christ state – the activity of the Divine in man; this is what happened in Jesus of Nazareth, for this reason He is Jesus Christ. This is the

authentic message contained in the Gospel: that each human being learn to discover and live the Divine reality which beats in his innermost depths. Buddhism speaks in similar terms about Buddha. Buddha, like Christ, is not an entity but a state of consciousness attainable by any human being. As the Buddhist teachers rightly teach: we all carry a Buddha in our hearts; what we must do is foster its manifestation. And the fostering of this manifestation is only attained through the denial of self. Because of its universality, the Catholic Christian Church was called precisely to foster – through the denial of self – the Christ state in all believers and in all men; but the more it moved away from living the Gospel, the more worldly and institutionalized it became, even to “nationalizing itself “as Roman.

In the Roman Catholic Institution there has been a basic blindness in its wanting to reduce and limit Divine revelation to the Bible, believing that God’s communication with man ended with the Apocalypse. This was, purely and simply, to tie the hands of Jesus Christ and to gag Him, regarding Him as something like a cadaver, a fossilized reality. If Christ is Life, Dynamism, He cannot be caged in, as a prisoner of some sacred text. The Sacred Scriptures of the different religions are a living example of this constant and permanent *Dynamism* of the Being. There is no basis for placing one Sacred Scripture above the rest; all are equally genuine but they are expressed according to the historical circumstances in which they arise, and according to the degree of evolution of the people where they originate.

The intervention of the Divine, the manifestation of the Being as a personal experience of man, is a permanent necessity, since there is always the danger that a given Divine revelation, arising in certain historical conditions, may claim

to and succeed in becoming absolutized. Every absolutized sacred book is a sacrilege, is a blasphemy against the Truth of the Being. No sacred book, no message can aspire to be regarded as the only and final Word.

One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Message revealed to us through *the slave of the Lord* is precisely its full consciousness of the fact that the Being is essentially ineffable, that there is no doctrine, no system, that can presume to be His absolute representative. This Message is nothing less than a call that the Being makes to the men of today; it is the voice of the Being for us today; it is the clarion call to awaken us from our unconsciousness and to enable us to realize our own personal experience of the Being.

The doctrine of Buddha, the Gospel as well as this Message are a call from the Being for man to actually *put into practice* the denial of self. Now then, just as institutionalized Christianity and Buddhism have distorted the *word of* their two great *Masters*, something similar could happen to the *word* contained in this Message.

A Case of Conscience is, above all, a practical example of how three Franciscans were able to hear the call of the Being through this Message. It can be said that upon coming to consciousness of the unconsciousness in which they were living, they decided to take the leap into the void in order to realize, through the denial of their ego, their own personal experience of the Being. It can therefore be said that the rescue of Jesus Christ within the Christian institutions is already on the move; there is no doubt that these three will be joined by a great many others. The Institution no longer offers any real incentive for an evolved man and an authentic Christian to remain under its roof. But this rescue of Christ that is being carried out within the Christian institutions will

have to be repeated analogously in all religious institutions regardless of the creed they profess, for Christ is the activity of the Divine in man. In short, *A Case of Conscience* is to be taken as a voice of alert for the entire species, for the man of today, so that he may come to the consciousness of himself, of his absolute reality: the preeminence of the Being.

J. R. Guillent Perez

Caracas, Venezuela, November 18, 1982

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Acta Custodiae Terrae Sanctae (ACTS)

Official periodical publication of the Custody of the Holy Land in which appear documents of the Holy See, of the Franciscan Order, and of the Custody, and all that which in any way should be known by the religious of the Custody.

Acting Custos

Religious who up to 1980 was elected by the central governing body of the Custody of the Holy Land on the occasions of the Custos' absence from the territory of the same. He exercised the same jurisdictional powers as the Custos.

Canonical Visit

Function that is fulfilled every six years by a representative of the Minister General with the task of informing the central governing body of the Order about the spiritual and religious life and the activities of the visited Province.

Capitular Congress

Meeting of the new central governing body of the Custody of the Holy Land that takes place every three years after the Custodial Chapter, under the direction of the President of the Chapter, in order to elect the Guardians and superiors of the different houses of the Custody and to designate the members of the religious families, assigning to each one his own office and duties according to the internal and external activities of each house.

Casa Nova

House assigned by the Franciscans to give lodging to pilgrims in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth.

Christian Information Centre

Centre for religious information in Jerusalem for the service of pilgrims, founded and directed by the Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land.

Custodial Chapter

Triennial meeting in which two groups of religious of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land participate: the first with the right to participate by virtue of their office (the President, the members of the central governing body of the Custody and the Guardians); the second, a number of religious equal to the first, chosen by the rest of the religious of the Custody who have an active voice. It has legislative and elective powers in relation to the election of the Discrets of the Holy Land and the Custodial Vicar. It studies the main problems of the Custody.

Custodial Vicar

Religious who forms part of the Discretorium of the Holy Land. He is elected every six years in the Custodial Chapter. Second in authority in the Custody since 1980. He substitutes for the Custos on the occasions of his absence from the central seat or from the Custody.

Custody of the Holy Land

Religious institution established as part of the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor in the first half of the 14th century. At the present time it extends to the following countries: Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, Rhodes, Istanbul. It is represented in almost every part of the world by religious at its service who are called Commissaries of the Holy Land. The main purpose of the Custody is the liturgical service in the most important shrines of the Holy Land as well as the custody and maintenance of the same. The religious belong to about thirty nationalities and they perform various activities: Parochial service for the benefit of the Catholic faithful of the Latin rite, spiritual assistance to the pilgrims, social-educational activities.

Custos of the Holy Land

Religious who represents the supreme authority in the Custody of the Holy Land. He is elected every six years by the Minister General on the basis of a list of three candidates presented by all the religious of the Custody.

Discret of the Holy Land

Religious member of the Discretorium or central governing body of the Custody of the Holy Land.

Discretorium of the Holy Land

Council formed by seven religious elected every three years in the Custodial Chapter who represent seven different language groups. They form, together with the Custos and the Custodial Vicar, the central governing body of the Custody of the Holy Land.

General Constitutions

Body of changeable laws established by the General Chapter and approved by the Holy See which, together with the Rule, govern the entire Franciscan Order of Friars Minor.

Guardian

Religious who is entrusted with the spiritual direction and animation of a religious family for a three-year period, with the right of participating in the triennial Custodial Chapter. In the fulfillment of his office, he is assisted by a council of religious called Conventual Discrets and by the Conventual Chapter formed of all the members of the family.

Holy Office

Ancient name for the department of the Holy See that has as its purpose the safeguarding and defense of the doctrinal and moral contents of the Catholic Church, today called the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Milk Grotto

Shrine in Bethlehem located at a short distance from the Nativity Grotto, where, according to tradition, Mary and Joseph with the infant Jesus lived for a while before fleeing to Egypt, pursued by Herod. In this place the Virgin Mary breast-fed the Infant. This is why it is called the Milk Grotto. A religious from the Franciscan monastery of Bethlehem takes care of the shrine under the authority of the Father Guardian.

Minister General

Supreme authority of the Order of Friars Minor, elected every six years by the General Chapter. He governs the Order together with a council formed by religious called General Definitors, who represent the various linguistic circumscriptions into which the Order is divided. He is directly dependent on the Holy See through the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes.

Order (Franciscan)

Religious institution based on the *Rule* written by Francis of Assisi at the beginning of the 13th century and approved by the Church. The Order is divided into three independent branches, each one with its own hierarchy and legislation: Friars Minor or simply Franciscans, Friars Minor Conventuals, Friars Minor Capuchins. The branch of the Friars Minor Franciscans to which the Custody of the Holy Land belongs is made up of almost a hundred Provinces spread throughout the whole world.

Priestly Ministry

Spiritual and religious activity, especially in reference to the Sacraments and the Word, that the persons who have received the Sacrament of Orders perform for the welfare of the faithful of the Catholic Church.

Procurator General (Office of the)

Term that, up to 1980, used to designate the central administrative office of the Custody of the Holy Land.

Reform

Attempt to bring the Franciscan Order back to the primitive observance of the *Rule*.

During the many centuries of its history, the Order of Friars Minor has known – in regards to the content of the Evangelical Poverty that had been revealed to Francis and which he had personally lived – many and contrasting attempts at reform motivated by the search for the genuine existential meaning of Francis’ true “message”, which with the changing of times has come to be in opposition to the concrete life of the Friars. Each reform has always constituted an effort for an integral return to the real content of the precepts of the *Rule* without returning to its source, the genuine and original intuition of Francis so vigorously reaffirmed in his Testament: *“After the Lord gave me brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I had to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel”*.

Religious Profession

Public act of consecration to God with the three vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, made in the Catholic Church and officially recognized by the same, by virtue of which a person enters to form part of a Religious Institution (Order, Congregation or Secular Institute), acquiring rights and duties.

Rule (Franciscan)

Unchangeable fundamental law of the Franciscan Order written by Francis of Assisi and approved by the supreme authority of the institutional Catholic Church.

Statutes of the Holy Land

Body of particular laws that determine the juridical and religious structure and features of the Custody of the Holy Land.

Temple of Solomon

Holy Place in the city of Jerusalem on Mount Moria where Solomon built the first Temple, destroyed by Sennacherib; rebuilt after the exile of 587 B.C. and repaired by Herod the Great, it was definitively destroyed by Titus in the year 70 A.D. On the same site there now stands a religious building constructed by the Moslems in the 8th century, known as the Mosque of Omar or the Dome of the Rock. The surrounding area is called, because of its vastness, the Esplanade of the Temple.

Vicar General

Religious who forms part of the General Definitorium. Second in authority in the Order of Friars Minor. He substitutes for the Minister General on the occasions of his absence from the central seat.

Visitor General

Religious designated every six years by the Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor with the purpose of informing the central governing body – through private and personal meetings with each one of the religious belonging to a given Province – about everything that concerns the

spiritual and religious life, the activities of the religious, and the buildings of the same Province. Ordinarily he also fulfills the function of President of the Chapter and of the Capitular Congress.

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