

I have subscribed to FIRST THINGS for over a decade. As a Capuchin Franciscan friar also concerned about the decline of mainline religious congregations, I turned with interest to Fr. Benedict Groeschel's "The Life and Death of Religious Life." I was happy his perspective has also been influenced by the insights of Victor Turner and Gerald Arbuckle. At the same time, his arguments would have been more persuasive had he not resorted to broad generalizations, including unfounded references to my Capuchin Order.

He writes that he joined the Detroit province of the Capuchins in 1951, when it "had almost seven hundred friars." Yet he did not indicate that this was a year before it amicably divided between the "East" (which

became the White Plains province) and the "West" (the Detroit province). This division was the major reason for the subsequent large drop in numbers. At the same time, I will be the first to admit that each new province, fifteen years later and beyond, experienced its own "exo-

odus," which took place in all groups of mainline religious congregations in this country.

Fr. Groeschel indicates that today "the province has fewer than a dozen men in formation." If formation involves canonical postulancy and novitiate and temporary vows, then

the Detroit province by itself has twelve men in initial formation. The White Plains province has twenty-six men. The combined total is thirty-eight, more than three times the number alleged by Fr. Groeschel, who also notes that, when he joined, the Capuchin Order was "the fourth-largest religious order of men in the Church." It still is. We've stabilized at more than eleven thousand friars. We are projected to begin growing once again. Ten years ago, when I gave a series of workshops in South Africa to the African Capuchins, we already were in more than half the sub-Saharan African nations. In fact, since Fr. Groeschel's departure, the order has expanded into more than twenty additional nations.

Finally, although he decided to leave the White Plains province, more than thirty years after the division between it and my province, I think I am familiar enough with events leading to the split between the province and him and his followers (who later had their own ideological split) to be surprised by his statement that "my own community experienced considerable resistance when we first attempted to reform within the jurisdiction of the Capuchin Order." From my understanding, the order did not reject his reforming efforts. Indeed, it even offered him *his own jurisdiction* within the order to bring about his desired reform. It offered him an unclaimed area of the United States where he could create his own jurisdiction, with men joining him to bring about his desired reform, *within the order*. He refused. Rejecting offers to create his own separate jurisdiction, he left our order to found his own congregation. It didn't need to be this way. I have met fine men who have joined his community, but I am inspired by the integrity, fidelity, and commitment of our new brothers as well.

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