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25 YEARS IN THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

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An Interview with Gustavo Gutierrez

*("There is a little man in Peru, a man without any power, who lives in a barrio with poor people and who wrote a book. In this book he simply reclaimed the basic Christian truth that God became human to bring good news to the poor, new light to the blind, and liberty to the captives. Ten years later this book and the movement it started are considered dangerous by the greatest power on earth. When I look at this little man, Gustavo, and think about the tall Ronald Reagan, I see David standing before Goliath again with no more weapon than a little stone, called A Theology of Liberation." (Henri Nouwen in !Gracias!, published by Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1983).*

*On January 16, this "little man", Gustavo Gutierrez, celebrated the 25th Anniversary of his ordination into the priesthood. The following interview was made to mark that occasion.)*

On January 16th, Gustavo, you will complete 25 years of ordination as a priest. How do you look upon this period of your life?

Well, the truth is that I feel as much accompanied as I do accompanying. Plain and simple, I belong to the people and I seek to walk with them and within this context, to live out my faith in Christ, which I share with the people. Also from there, I begin a theological reflection.

It is also from there that, in effect, have arisen the theological themes that you have dealt with. One of them-a central one, it seems to me-is the theme of life which you present as a confrontation with death?

From a theological perspective, the overwhelming fact is the poverty in which the huge majority of people lives. It marks their existence and also constitutes the great challenge to a human and Christian conscience.

It seems clear to me that the poverty that exists among us means, above everything else, death. (It means) physical death for many. Children (we have one of the highest indices of infant mortality in Latin America) and adults die because of hunger and lack of medical attention, but also because of repression by those who defend a social order that benefits the minorities. And it equally means death at other levels: cultural death, for example, of peoples whose own racial,

linguistic and cultural characteristics are not recognized; absence of respect for human dignity, as in the case of women, particularly women of the poor sectors.

In the face of this cruel reality, we rediscover something fundamental in the Christian message: the announcement of life, expressed concretely in the resurrection of our Lord, ... I believe that which we call theology of liberation is born precisely out of the contrast between the reality of death and the Kingdom of life about which the Gospel speaks.

We are presently experiencing a climate of violence in this country that shows this contempt for life. Although at first we were horrified at some things that happened, now the horrors are becoming daily happenings. The most terrible thing that could happen to us is that we become accustomed to that lack of respect for the most fundamental right of the human person which is the right to live. Although all violations of that right—from wherever they may come—deserve to be rejected, we cannot stop pointing out that violations that are committed by those who have precisely the function of protecting social order and of establishing justice, are doubly scandalous, especially when that conduct is incited by, justified or tolerated by responsible politicians called to watch over the common good.

What has happened these days in Lima—many of us still have the horrible images before our eyes of the murder of 8 prisoners and a nun in an attempted escape from the Lurigancho prison—has shown us this contempt one more time, this time in full daylight and in front of television cameras, that makes one wonder what could be occurring in the more hidden corners of our country. In fact, during these same days, without a single explanation being given, the deaths of one hundred people in Ayacucho were reported.

I believe that all these things cannot help but challenge us. We have to make every effort not to accept these events as part of our daily life. We have to maintain our capacity for horror and rejection, as well as our capacity to demand justice.

Sometimes I have heard you quote a phrase from Bernanos: "When I die, tell the sweet kingdom of earth that I loved it more deeply than I ever dared to say." What does that mean for you?

That phrase from Bernanos has always seemed very beautiful to me because it was said by a man who felt very deeply, painfully in some moments, the demands of being Christian and who knew how to express and live out, with great strength, an attitude of detachment—of asceticism, to use an old expression. At the same time, he was someone who deeply loved this world, which he referred to as the Kingdom of this earth. In his works, that love for the everyday, for the little things, for the small and great happinesses in life, is present even in his most tormented characters.

I believe that without a profound love for the human realities, from the most concrete to the smallest—and we find this very clearly in the Bible, too—that there is no authentic Christian life.

The Christian is not one who disdains these values of friendship, of beauty, of the everyday; on the contrary, the Christian is one who esteems them. Finally, there is here, I believe, the dimension which we Christians call the incarnation, God who has become man and who has taken on all human realities.

How do you see the future? What signs, what possibilities are there for realizing the hopes and plans for the poor of Peru and all Latin America?

I believe the poor, in spite of everything, maintain a great capacity to affirm and claim their rights, to organize themselves and to become increasingly the protagonists in their own history.

In spite of the fact that the situation we have talked about could result in disenchantment, frustration, and even a certain skepticism in some persons, I think that in the popular sectors-in many of them, at least-hopefulness and the capacity to transform the situation are maintained to a high degree and it is in them that the historical possibility (to effect changes) resides. Just as important as this hard, painful situation, is the will of many to change it, realistically, without illusions, based on firm foundations.

I believe the Gospel is not alien to these intentions and hopes, but on the contrary, it accompanies, strengthens and encourages them in many parts of Peru and in Latin America.

Confidence in the sane forces of poor people, as much as faith in God, gives Christians solid basis for a hope that I would like to call realistic. Because beyond what some skeptics may think, I believe that the people are opening a way and it is from there that the Christian community is also expressing new forms of faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

There is a terrible phrase in the Bible, in the letters of St. Paul, "I will destroy the intelligence of the intelligent". Perhaps that is the basic condition for respecting that role of the people.

Destruction of the intelligence "of the intelligent", not of intelligence. In the Peruvian intellectual world, there have been attempts to be near the life, including the expressions, of the people. Arguedas, for example, is a notable case, but that is a process that I consider to be just beginning.

I also believe that it is important not to fall into an easy romanticism. Expressions that we often say come from the people are, in reality, induced by innumerable influences including the communications media. As such, a certain discernment must operate in whatever comes from the people, including their role as protagonist in their history.

In any case, I believe that much stronger links are needed between the intellectuals who have the necessary tools to formulate a way of thought and the life of the people. To put themselves at the service of the people, not without discernment but authentically at their service, is one of the great tasks of those whom we call intellectuals.

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INVOLVEMENT WITH THE URBAN POOR

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An Experience in the Philippines

Emelina Villegas, ICM

*(We are grateful to Sister Emelina for the text of this address which she presented to the Executive Committee of Caritas Internationalis at their meeting held in Rome, November 7-13, 1984).*

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It is about 30 years now since I became involved with the poor. I have gone through 3 stages.

1. High school years: As a member of the Legion of Mary I took pains in teaching the rosary to the poor vendors around the parish and encouraged them to go to Mass on Sundays or to send their children to the Sunday catechism classes. With other members of our praesidium, we would go "home visiting" with the aim of helping the parishoners to validate their marriages.

2. College years: During these years broader contacts were provided through the school's organizations. During this period I experienced the reality of the slums for the first time, characterised by filth and squalor, by dingy make-shift housing, by overcrowding, by unstable family relations and by a livelihood full of insecurity. Later, I learned that slums were a post-war phenomenon. The system of land tenure deprived the rural folks of opportunities and development was concentrated in the city centres. Village people were forced to migrate to the cities where there seemed to be more and better opportunities for living. The influx of the rural folks to the cities became massive. The cities were not able to absorb them and so, the rural people were forced to cluster on the banks of the rivers or big canals, along the railroads, around the piers, under the bridges or on empty lots. Squatting became rampant and later was declared illegal.

Through the CRS aid I was able to gather the children for recreational activities while their mothers patiently lined up to get some kind of food foreign to their taste and their dietary habits. Later on, as religious missionary and with a little more training my involvement became more organized. A more rounded social programme was designed for the people within the setting of a social center, which led on to personal counselling, then adult and vocational training, leadership formation, community development and organization.

I experienced the poor as malnourished, passive, resigned, apathetic, patiently suffering, and dependent. They ran from one charity institution to another in the hope of getting a little bit more for the day. Family life revolved around the next meal. The father, with or without a job was out of the house and at night, usually drank; the mother was busy with laundry work or other odd jobs

to augment the family income while the small children were left playing in the streets.

3. At the cross-roads: In the late sixties and early seventies, with the onset of student activism and peasant unrest, and the publication of the Synod document on Justice there came a deeper inquiry into the situation of poverty of the great majority of the people. Through the grassroots community organization, the people themselves went deeper into the causes of their destitute situation. This attempt led to an analysis not only of their situation but also of the type of social relations operating in the whole of society and in the world. Poverty arises not just because Juan de la Cruz is lazy. It is a phenomenon brought about by the process of economic and political domination of persons and groups over the majority, and of nations over other nations through the presence of multinational corporations and some financial institutions.

Neither is it a problem of scarcity on the one hand, and over-population on the other hand, but the result of economic and political policies within a system where profit is the highest value. A glimpse at our history shows that although we got our independence in 1946 from the US we remained economically dependent on the US through unequal treaties and agreements. Our present export-oriented and import-dependent economy and our dictatorial/authoritarian government are the continuation of the terms of these treaties and agreements.

Martial Law: The declaration of martial law in 1972 brought out more glaringly the induced dependence of the Philippines on the United States. The need for raw materials and semi-finished products, the need for a market for their own products, and the presence of the military bases are the main interests of the US in the Philippines. All these have to be maintained through the policies of the law or by coercion if necessary.

Recovering from the after-shock of martial law the people began to move in spite of the threat of arrests and detention. The govt. programmes for slum clearance, demolition, and resettlement were resisted vehemently by the people. Human barricades were formed to prevent the entry of police and military men. Workers launched collective actions in the factories to demand higher wages and benefits, better working condition and job security. Strike movements spread. Demonstrations, rallies, protests, and marches became avenues for airing grievances and asserting workers' rights.

Church Personnel: The majority of church people were caught unawares by this turn of events. Statements questioning Martial law were issued by the Bishops while the Major-Superiors set up task-forces to conscientize both Church people, the masses. Data-gathering was encouraged as an alternative to the controlled media treatment of political detainees. A small group of church personnel who had been with the people all along, supported the demands of the people. Loose groupings were formed such as the Friends of the farmers, the workers, the drivers, and the urban poor.

At this point, I found myself at the crossroads. Should I continue my usual work at the social center or should I participate in the actions of the poor who have awakened and who have found some ways of solving their problems? I was in a dilemma because I had

been so used to dispensing services to the people and to dealing with the "poorest of the poor". What would work in solidarity with them entail? After deeper study, reflection and consultation with some friends, I decided to integrate myself with the workers and enter more deeply into their life and struggles. The people themselves had taken up the responsibility. The best I could do was to affirm and support this. They would then be in a better position to care for the other poor people.

A New Religious Community: With the encouragement of my superiors, and with two other sisters I formed a community in a factory-belt area where the families clustered around the factories. Young boys and girls of about 16 and over worked in the factories. Most of them were high school graduates receiving then, only P25-30 a day (about \$2.00) and to-day only P55.80 (\$2.50).

For about one and a half years, I integrated myself with them while taking up a part-time paying job for the Major Superiors. I visited the workers in their homes, ate with them, slept with them, sat at their meetings sometimes till late in the evening, stood at the picketline with them, solicited funds with them, went along to the Ministry of Labour and Employment with them for complaints, sat at the negotiating table with the management and joined them in rallies and demonstrations. I affirmed them, supported them, questioned and challenged them, broadened their horizon. I came to know them, their way of looking at things, persons, and events, their way of acting, thinking, feeling and valuing. I became part of their joys and pains, their hopes and fears, their uncertainties and their continuing struggle to be human and free. I celebrated life and the Word with them. I, on the other hand, became vulnerable to them. They questioned the big gap between words and actions, between ideals and realism.

This dialogue of life became for me my involvement. I discovered then, the potentials of people who are organized and who realize that their individual interests are also the common interest of a great majority of the people and that cooperation among them is the road to emancipation and human development.

At this time I experienced the poor as socially and politically aware, refusing to be victims, struggling to assert their rights and taking up responsibilities amidst great economic difficulties. I saw them break-out of their shells, gradually finding words to express what was happening to them and unearthing their genuine aspirations for freedom and justice. Their articulations were often raw and rough but certainly authentic. They combined warmth and a sense of hospitality with militancy and radicality.

Confrontation: The growing resistance of all sectors of the population was gradually met by government with greater repression on three levels:

- economically - by maintaining low wages or by retrenchment, lay-offs, or rotation,
- Politically - by massive-militarization and violation of human rights. This was combined with deceptive legislation and with presidential decrees and letters of instructions which are not disseminated to the public,

Culturally - by continuously projecting colonial and capitalistic values and by thought-control through the media and education.

Socio-political actions were answered by arbitrary arrests and detention, torture, harassments, 'hamletting', 'salvaging' and outright killing. People in the hinterlands were forced to leave their lands and properties to escape military actions and atrocities. Deprived of their roots the people became displaced persons in their own country.

In order to surmount this force, made up of our own national government with the support of the US, and to overcome the existing fragmentation among the people themselves, organizations cooperate and coordinate earnestly with one another and form alliances. For example, the workers are no longer confined just to their particular union, but set up alliances on various levels, for example by type of industry, or in the industrial belt, or town-wide, or in conglomerates. Workers join other sectors like farmers, fishermen, tribal Filipinos, professionals, youth, Church people, to gain greater strength and basic unity. Their greatest strength is surely not in armed weapons, no matter how justified this might be but in their greater numbers and most of all, by the "justness" of their cause.

The social transformation of society is the ardent task of the people. This is not only accepted but affirmed by them. Some Church sectors participate in this. Following the dialogue of life comes involvement with the human project of the people. My little contribution for the moment is in the area of research in view of the continuous education and formation of the workers. I make available to them the findings of science and technology so that these may be used for the fulfillment of the common aspirations of the poor. Contrary to the present system of education which is professional and legalistic we design comprehensive, critical and analytical education which can harness their newly discovered power for full human development.

With hindsight and based on my present understanding of persons and society, I would roughly picture the three stages of my involvement in this way:

1. Spiritual Welfare: This is a remnant of the spirit permeating the church in the 19th century. Persons are seen as culturally deprived, meaning that there are those who are not so imbued with faith and with the life of the Spirit and that there is a need to be constantly reminded and concerned, about this. The church is seen as an assembly of those who are "saved" and her mission is to save as many people as possible. People need to be drawn into the fountain of grace. The great concern for the salvation of self and others is on an individual level.

2. Social services for the uncrganized poor: People are seen not only as culturally deprived but as economically poor. There is recognition of the wide gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots", hindering the full human development of the poor. The task is to uplift the poor but on the model of the "haves". The more social services are created the better.



A sound socio-economic basis for the development of people is laid down but without going deeply, into the root causes of the problems and without linking national problems with international realities. Problems and solutions are tackled on the personal level only.

The spirit permeating this stage is similar to the concept of development where wealth has to trickle-down to the people through the agents of the government. Spiritually translated, grace has to trickle-down to the people through the Church. The Church is the pastoral agent bringing about the humanity of the people.

3. Social involvement with the organized poor: The people see themselves as economically poor and exploited, politically oppressed, and culturally deprived and see that wealthy and powerful groups in society have taken over decisions at the expense of the majority of the people.

A new consciousness enables the people to come up with genuine aspirations and legitimate demands leading them to organize and to take on responsibility for changing society. The organized power and unity of the people, based on common interests, lays down the foundation for a just and equitable society. The Church participates in this human project of the people bearing in mind "the blowing of the Spirit where it wills", in whatever form or manner. This calls for a new spirituality, a constant deciphering of the Spirit of God in the actions of the people as a group within a given historical time and place.

These involvements could easily be claimed by any individual (or analogously by any institution) in the mainstream of people's lives.

At the moment, there is an urgent call for a massive effort to participate in changing the structures of societies, nationally and internationally, while at the same time working for our personal conversion and remoulding. Concretely:

- 1) The policies of our institutions should project JUSTICE as a primary value, and the justness of the cause of the oppressed.
- 2) The programmes should be geared towards:
  - sustaining the organizations and actions of the people so that they are able to forge greater unity;
  - raising the social and political consciousness of Church people so that more may participate in people's actions;
  - social services which are means to help sustain the struggle for people's right
  - international links and solidarity work.
- 3) The development of the staff and constitutents should stress:
  - the centrality of JUSTICE in the Bible;
  - analysis of the systems and forces in society;
  - systematic links between national governments and international agents such as multinationals, and their effects on the lives of the majority of the people;
  - methods and approaches which are participative, inductive and historical;
  - social teachings of the Church.
- 4) The evaluation of the programmes should take as reference point the

promotion of JUSTICE.

- 5) The ongoing reflection is an attempt to integrate faith and involvement, leading to the shaping of a spirituality which is Christ-centered and people-oriented.

Hopefully, our coming together here at this time, is already a beginning or a continuation of our response to the signs of the times. The challenge is before us and the possibilities are in our hands: What shall prevent us from unbinding the risen body of Lazarus?

Sr. Emelina Villegas, ICM

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FAMINE IN AFRICA - THE OFFSPRING OF WAR

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A Message of Solidarity from Caritas Internationalis,  
Rome to Caritas Africa.

*("If war ceased in Angola to-day, the population would be able to feed itself at the end of one year, and the same is true of Ethiopia. There is still, and there will be, need of emergency help, to alleviate the appalling consequences of drought in Ethiopia, the Sahel countries and elsewhere, but the real demon is war and the arms industry in both of which, the wealthy powers, East and West, are deeply involved." This is the firm conviction, expressed to me last week, by a participant in the Executive Council meeting of Caritas Internationalis. The message of solidarity with Caritas of Africa should inspire us to do all we can to promote peace and protest the growth of the arms industry. Ed.).*

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1. Animated by the charity of Christ, we, the members of Caritas Internationalis, meeting in Rome from the 7th to the 14th, November 1984,

- confronted mainly with the problems of hunger, refugees and rural exodus;
- while having programmed an all-out action to contribute towards alleviating the immediate needs of the victims of these realities;

2. ascertain that in this context, the wars which are rending apart a number of African countries, constitute one of the main causes of these major problems.

These wars are imposed on the peoples of Africa by foreign ideologies and forces; they often break out in the wake of power struggles; they are nurtured by a massive arms trade which drains precious economic resources from food, health and education budgets.

3. Aware of the Gospel message which calls us to solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Africa, we invite all the national offices of Caritas, the world over - in communion and concertation with their Episcopates - to intensify their efforts with their national communities and their governments, in order to find just and durable solutions for putting an end to these fratricidal wars.
4. In a particular way, we encourage the Caritas Offices of the countries implicated in the production and sale of arms, and where the populations are accustomed to a life-style which is maintained as a result of the pillage of raw materials from developing countries, to persevere in their efforts of informing the Christian community and the public in general, so that the latter become aware of their responsibilities and agree to change their life-style.
5. We also recommend that the Caritas Internationalis representatives at the international centres voice these preoccupations in an urgent concern for peace.

Rome, 14 November 1984.

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"THE GOSPEL CHALLENGES US"

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Reflections from Bahia on Evangelization, 1983

"What we have seen and heard, we are telling you" (1 Jn 1,3).

*(Following is the text of the Reflections drawn up at the bi-annual meeting of the OFM Plenary Council, held in Salvador, Bahia in June 1983. The document was circulated to all the Friars Minor for their comment and reactions. These are now being processed. We are grateful to the OFM for this text. Ed.)*

1. Brazilians refer to the state of Bahia as "The Land of Happiness." The Plenary Council of 1983 came to the city of Salvador, where the friars first came in 1500. We came to reflect on the working paper, "Evangelization and Mission in the Order" within a Third World context and in Latin America where, as Father General put it, "so many creative and innovative developments in evangelization and mission have been taking place."
2. We were introduced to a city of glaring contrasts. Modern office buildings tower over structures centuries old. Scattered among high rise condominiums are hundreds of pockets of squalor. Of the city's million and a half people, 600,000 live in favelas, and these are but a small percentage of the millions trapped in such slums in Brazilian cities. Statistics from Brazil serve as an example of the poverty suffered in many countries: 1% are very rich, 4% rich, 15% middle class, 40% poor, and 40% destitute.
3. We walked through favelas of makeshift shacks, open sewers, stench, sick children and parents without hope. We talked to the people and to friars and others who live and work there. Many of the people have been driven into the city by drought or expulsion from their land. They come seeking work where there is no work. Their attempts to better their lives are frustrated. Against the backdrop of such destitution, these reflections are made.
4. What we saw in Brazil mirrors the poverty we know exists in all other parts of the world. We listened to each other describe from our own countries -- north, south, east and west -- similar slums, unemployment, underdevelopment, violence and repression, the misery left by natural calamities. Stories of forced abortions, unjust imprisonment, present-day martyrs and some of the 15 million refugees who wander about our world have been on our minds and in our prayers during our sessions.
5. We have attempted to do as Pope Paul VI asked in Evangelii Nuntiandi, "to look at the concrete social, economic and political reality in which people live." Even though we have seen poverty before, once again it has been a jarring experience, helping us to see, we hope, with the eyes of Jesus and Francis. We have reflected on

the realities we face, the Gospel and our Franciscan mission. With faith and conviction we are telling you what we have seen and heard, and what we have discovered anew -- our need to be evangelized ourselves before we can evangelize anyone else.

6. Friar Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider spoke to us of the conversion of the Brazilian bishops in taking a strong stance on the side of the poor -- a preferential option for the poor which is not popular with the government nor with many of the wealthy. Their action has taken definite and effective shape in realistic and measurable pastoral planning throughout the country. At the heart of these plans are 100,000 Basic Ecclesial Communities, from which we too can learn.

7. Friar Leonardo Boff provided us with theological foundations and insights for the liberation theology of Latin America and reminded us as friars, "We do not have to create a liberation theology. What we must do is simply live out our minority, our Gospel poverty -- our Franciscan identity."

8. At the opening of the 1981 Plenary Council, John Vaughan, our Minister General said very simply: "Our vocation sends us to announce the Gospel to the nations. . . People are waiting for us to denounce war, the arms race, world hunger and injustice; they are waiting for us to do something about what we pray for and preach. . . they wait for us to mediate the Gospel values to the culture and society of today."

9. In his opening talk at this Plenary Council he repeated his plea: "We have the information. We have the documentation. We have . . . the inspiration of so many friar-apostles who have gone before us. What we seem to need today is . . . imagination and stimulation. . . We can do great things under God and with the help of His grace -- but we must get up and be doing!"

10. Our message, "The Gospel Challenges Us," is one response to his words. We believe it is one step in our own evangelization. We believe we have the Good News! In our reflections we offer a bit of that Good News to you-- in so many parts of the world -- as you live and work among God's people.

11. We are grateful to the poor who are our teachers. We are grateful to those who so joyfully serve the poor and abandoned. And finally we are thankful to be able to offer you, our brothers, these insights which are rooted in the Gospel and our Franciscan charism and can be used for our own evangelization and the evangelization of this world which we love.

## CHAPTER 1

### OUR MISSION IS EVANGELIZATION

12. We came to Brazil knowing that we have been invited by the Spirit of God to be evangelizers and given the task by you, our brothers, to reflect on how to do this more effectively today. We looked to the world we must evangelize and attempted to discern the signs of the times.

We look to the Scriptures and to our Father Francis.

13. In our world, full of hopes and aspirations, we see a desire for community, peace, justice and the promotion of human dignity together with a desire for the satisfaction of basic human needs. At the same time society is plagued with atheism and religious indifference, conflicting ideologies, wars, racism, oppression, and an ever widening gap between rich and poor. Faced with such a world situation, what do we have to offer?

14. Jesus tells us: "The Spirit of the Lord has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people" (Lk 4, 18-19). This is the mission of the Church to reveal Jesus and the Kingdom he proclaimed. He wants to free all humans from sin and all that oppresses them so they can enjoy the fullness of his life -- a life of justice, peace, hope, joy and love.

15. On our part accepting Jesus' way demands metanoia, personal and communal conversion, as we seek to penetrate cultures with Gospel values. We must be more and more evangelized ourselves, freeing ourselves from sin and from any part we might have in injustice and oppression, from all that in any way hinders us from receiving and proclaiming God's love at work in the world.

16. Searching to be better evangelizers, we look to Francis who brought new insights and emphasis to his times.

Brotherhood	-When some in the Church condemned those outside her fold as heretics, and even sent armies against them, Francis proclaimed the good news that they are our brothers and sisters.
Peace	-When city warred with city and society was divided by the feudal system, he proclaimed the good news of peace.
Poverty	-When riches were sought after as a god, he proclaimed anew the good news of the "blessedness" of the poor.
Minority	-When the goal of many was power and might, he proclaimed the good news of being little ones.
Ecology	-When some feared nature, and others sought to subject it to their uses, he proclaimed the good news that the earth was our sister/mother, and all creation one family to be treated with respect.
Presence	-When some religious secluded themselves from the people, Francis wanted his friars to be near ordinary people, present to the <u>minores</u> .
Holy Spirit	-When the Church was highly institutionalized, Francis was conscious of the role of the Spirit and never tired of reminding his brothers to be "men of the Spirit," and told them that the Holy Spirit is the true Minister General of our Order.

We see these same emphasis as important in our times and will briefly reflect on them in the following chapters.

17. As Friars Minor, then we are called to be an "Evangelizing vanguard," in a Church which must be continually re-incarnated and renewed. Accordingly, we must be especially alert and sensitive to

the movements of the Holy Spirit, both within and without the Church. Besides ministering to the faithful, we see a need to reach out in our own societies to those yet untouched by the Gospel and to those alienated from the Gospel as traditionally presented. By our presence we will try to help them interpret their experience and encourage the good that we find. If it seems to be God's will, we will explicitly proclaim the Lord.

Moreover, to those local Churches in Asia, Africa and Latin America in great need of assistance, we ask our friars to respond generously. Three billion people have yet to hear the Gospel. We have a great opportunity and challenge to bring the vision of Francis and at the same time to be enriched by these cultures.

18. This Plenary Council calls on all the friars:

- 1) to let Christ evangelize us.
- 2) to seek nourishment in the Scriptures, in the Eucharist, and in various forms of common and private prayer, which will give life and vitality to our evangelization. (LG 11, AG8, SC 10f).
- 3) to have "the spirit of the Lord and the working of his grace" in order to evangelize authentically.
- 4) to preach the Gospel to the faithful and with them to find new and creative ways of bringing the Good News to the unbelievers and unchurched Christians of our societies.
- 5) to support our friars who "by divine inspiration" go to live and dialogue with Islam and other living faiths.

## CHAPTER 2

### SENT AS BROTHERS

19. Today greed, racism, oppression and war divide peoples. But the seeds of hope, of new life can be seen in groups which promote solidarity especially on the international level, and in movements which promote human rights, ecumenism, trade unions, unity among youth and practical sharing with people in developing countries.

20. Such solidarity, sharing of life and work, is characteristic of a family, and this is what we humans are, all brothers and sisters, children of the same God in heaven. Jesus became our brother to unite all things in heaven and earth. He invites every person to become part of the family of God. To establish that family is the focus of our efforts.

21. Francis modeled his life on Jesus and imitated him in treating all people and creatures as family. He saw those who came to follow him as a gift from the Lord, and the Lord himself revealed to Francis that they should live as sisters and brothers.

22. When people saw the friars, they described them as men of God who showed an honest concern, a smiling face, mutual respect, gentleness and love. Their very lives gave witness to the Good News. They not only believed and proclaimed, but more importantly in their lives together and with the people they experienced the Gospel values

of Jesus Christ. If we really desire to evangelize today, people must first see in us those same values that were obvious in the lives of the early friars.

23. Our lifestyle as brotherhood can be an example to a world hungering for community and longing for a new and more human society. The Plenary Council asks the friars:

- 1) to find models of both initial and ongoing formation which are based on our experience with the poor and help us live a life of constant conversion to the Gospel and the poor.
- 2) to recognize and promote the gifts each brother has received from God.
- 3) to give witness to brotherhood as the best form of evangelizing: "By this shall all know that you are my disciples" (Jn 13, 35). Our brotherhood invites others to share what we are, what we have and what we do.
- 4) to take advantage of the greater mutual concern and sharing that can take place in small communities and to support renewal that seeks to realize these same values in our larger friaries, so that we can be prophetic models for more communitarian local Churches.
- 5) to cooperate wherever possible in our ministries, but especially in the apostolate of the press, radio and television as powerful means of proclaiming Gospel values.
- 6) to foster community among the entire Franciscan family, the First, Second and Third Orders.

### CHAPTER 3

#### MINORES AMONG THE POOR

24. Especially in the Third World most people suffer inhuman poverty: hunger, disease, illiteracy, unemployment and slum living.

Immigrants and refugees are left at the margin of society. Millions are politically oppressed, many tortured, even killed. The Church has a growing list of new martyrs. Each year 30 million die of hunger. Women are treated like objects and humiliated. The majority of people are excluded from social, economic and political progress. They enjoy little or no justice. No home, no land, no job, no money, no freedom they are tempted to despair.

25. Also the richer countries in East and West have their poor "marginalized" -- immigrants, minority groups, the unemployed handicapped and the politically and religiously persecuted. Even among the "haves" an increasing number are lonely, mentally ill, victims of alcohol or other drugs.

26. Sadly, the developed world is marked by consumerism, which values persons for what they produce and possess. By means of mass media consumerism spreads also to countries in process of development and creates fictitious needs and undermines values.



27. Already in the Old Testament and especially in the New, God's compassion for the poor is explicit. Jesus gave poverty its deepest meaning in his own person: in his birth, life and death on the cross. He identified with the poor (Matt. 25, 40). In word and action he proclaimed the power of being powerless. Far from marginalizing the poor, Jesus put them at the center of his life and ministry. In sending out his apostles, Jesus demanded that they go in poverty (Lk. 10). Mary his mother also lived as one of the poor (Lk 1, 46f).

28. Francis found Christ through the poorest of the poor, the leper. The love of the Father was made real for him through the poor infant of Bethlehem and the Suffering Servant at Calvary. Francis lived and worked with lepers and the poor to share their "blessedness." He rejoiced in their lowliness and disinterest in power, their tremendous confidence in Providence, and their freedom. We Franciscans too will find Jesus in being for the poor, with the poor and living as the poor do. Thus, it is through our poverty and minority that we are evangelized and evangelize.

29. Our following of the poor Christ will lead us to live with the poor as minores, living the same life with them, in solidarity with them, little and humble and powerless like them. In this way as we are evangelizing, we are being evangelized by them.

30. We must frankly acknowledge, however, that presently we often live far removed from the poor. Especially in this regard, we must evangelize ourselves again and again. We will truly become poor when we share their anxieties, insecurities and basic needs. As poor brothers among the poor, deprived of power, we will have to trust in the providence of God. Unsure of many things, we will be open to a dialogue of life with the people around us.

31. This vision of necessity changes our Franciscan stance in the world today, as many local Churches in Latin America have done by making a preferential option for the poor. Therefore the Plenary Council asks the friars:

- 1) to live with the poor, so that we can see history and reality from their point of view.
- 2) to refuse to buy or possess unnecessary goods in order to give prophetic witness against growing consumerism.
- 3) to learn from the poor the spirit of solidarity and authentic fraternity which is frequently difficult for us in our friaries-- often larger than needed and too comfortable.
- 4) to conscientize ourselves and people about the unjust system of socio-economic, political and cultural domination of millions of people in the third world by the super-powers and richer countries in East and West, multinationals and trans-nationals, and to promote a new economic and political order which will bring greater justice to our world.
- 5) to take a prophetic stance against all oppressive totalitarian regimes.

- 6) to bring the Gospel wherever the poor are organizing in favour of integral liberation -- be it popular organizations, labour unions, or other social awareness programs designed to lift people to a position where their rights are recognized and understood.

#### CHAPTER 4

##### INSTRUMENTS OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

32. The previous chapter referred to the injustice the poor suffer in being deprived of basic rights. Along with other human beings the poor also suffer the injustice that war causes. The contrasts between rich and poor exist in cities and countries, and even between the northern and southern hemispheres.
33. "The arms race, the great crime of our era, is both the result and cause of tensions among our fellow nations," the Bishops of Latin America declared at Puebla. "Because of it, enormous resources are allotted for arms purchases instead of being used to solve vital problems" (67). Pope John Paul II at Hiroshima forcefully proclaimed that in our world peace is a vital part of evangelization. "It is only through conscious choice...that humanity can survive!"
34. We are conscious of the violence of war. We are not as conscious of the violence that injustice causes. When a child starves to death, that is violence. In Brazil the Church and others are helping to raise consciousness about this kind of violence -- the violence of hunger, removal from land, imprisonment, torture and unemployment. The suffering of violence, direct and indirect, is a way of life for many people. To watch your children grow up with no future is violence.
35. God wills justice and peace for all his children. Great opportunities are offered us for doing this today through advances in communication, science and technology. Instead nations devote their resources to producing more and more weapons, without realizing the tragic consequences. In some countries people are made to believe that they are in a permanent war against subversion. In reality arms are most often used to maintain the domination of a few by repressing the democratic rights of the majority. Every day the cry of justice comes from those being harassed, exiled, imprisoned, tortured and even killed in broad daylight. Such a situation of repression and fear is already driving some people to take up arms in self-defence. Throughout the world the precarious balance of terror renders justice and love impossible. To maintain and justify such inhuman and un-Christian situations, nations use doctrines such as national security. They forget that security will not result from the possession of arms, but rather from mutual assistance among nations and peaceful coexistence.
36. To destroy each other, and our planet, cannot be the destiny God intends for the human race. We hear Isaiah: "I will keep my promise of peace forever!" (Is. 54, 10). Jesus himself promised: "Peace is what I leave with you, it is my peace that I give you" (Jn 14, 27). Confronted by the fact that \$1.44 billion is spent each day

on armaments, while 40,000 children starve to death daily, our world must find ways for Isaiah's admonition to be realized, i.e. turn our swords into plowshares (Is. 2, 4), and use this immense amount of money (\$500 billion per year) for the needs of our human family.

37. Francis understood from his own experience of God as his Father and Creator of the world, and his experience of Jesus as his brother, that only love can protect and defend every created being. Francis himself served as a peacemaker on many occasions. He admonished his lay followers not to bear arms for any reason, thus bringing an end to the many wars of his time and place. His was perhaps the most successful peace movement in human history.

38. Being peacemakers is a vital part of our Franciscan life and our evangelization of the world. The plenary Council calls friars:

- 1) to pray to be men at peace with God and all peoples, to make prayer and fasting part of our efforts for peace, to support movements which seek peace in our society, to be personally involved in such movements.
- 2) to support non-violent efforts for peace, offer support to conscientious objectors to war, especially nuclear war, to stand by those imprisoned for their convictions and efforts in behalf of justice and peace.
- 3) to develop a pedagogy of peace especially for the youth of our schools and seminaries.
- 4) to find ways to eliminate injustices among ourselves and in spite of our differences to live in peace together in our friaries as witnesses of the peace of Christ.
- 5) to involve friars full time for justice and peace where possible and support those friars already engaged in this work in Justice and Peace offices of the Order and Provinces.
- 6) to be a voice for the rights of the unborn, but also for those born but without hope of a future.
- 7) to condemn loudly and clearly the armament race and all nuclear weapons which have already been produced.

Ref. Plenary Council, OFM; Salvador - Brazil; June 1983.

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