

GENERAL SECRETARIAT FOR ON-GOING FORMATION

LIVING EVANGELICAL POVERTY WITH OUR LADY IN THE MENDICANT TRADITION

Introduction

Religious life has experienced a rapid evolution in the last twenty five years both in its conceptual and existential dimension. This evolution was brought about by a society that is tending towards consumerism and globalization. As every spheres of human society continue to evolve and address the pressing situation of the times, religious life is caught up in this web of change and evolution as it addresses its own reality and the realities around her.

As globalization and technological advancements has given us control over external world, it has alienated us from understanding the inner intricacies of the human person and the complex reality of his essence and existence. The human person was relegated to the periphery of his own existence, the crowning glory of God's creation. Alienating His creation would mean alienating the Creator. What is the role of religious life in this current, overbearing and complex situation? Where do we draw our reflections and eventually our solutions vis-à-vis a world that is globalized.

The reflection of the recent years has led the Order to perceive that it is important to go back to the central theme of every religious vocation: the search for and experience of God (GC 2001) and its concrete expression in the following of Christ starting with the spirituality of abandonment (CG 2007).

The central point of the General Chapter 2007 focused on theme of evangelical poverty, *Leaving everything, they followed Him* (Luke 5, 11). The important element in this sentence is not *leaving everything* but rather *they followed Him*. There is no sadness in leaving everything – but there is joy in discovering the pearl of great price. For every Servant of Mary, the option for evangelical poverty is not an end in itself but a choice made for the love for Christ.

The main objective of this paper is to help the Order to continue the journey towards our understanding of evangelical poverty in the mendicant tradition, understand human existence and development in the current macro-system and eventually come up with concrete projects as a realization of the reflections made in different communities, vicariates, and provinces.

I. A brief historical Overview of the Mendicant Order

Historical reasons for the origin of the mendicants are obvious. Since the struggle regarding investitures a certain animosity against church property had remained. Arnold of Brescia preached that monks and clerics who possessed property could not be saved. A little later John Valdes founded the "Poor Men of Lyons", soon followed by similar sects. The movement thus started in France and Italy had spread among the poorer classes at the beginning of the thirteenth century and threatened to become dangerous to the Church. By uniting utter poverty to entire subjection toward, St. Francis became with St. Dominic the bulwark of orthodoxy against the new heretics, and the two orders of Friars Minors and Preachers proved themselves a great help both to the inner and to the external life of the Church. Nor was absolute poverty the only characteristic of the new orders. They did not confine themselves to the sanctification of their own members; their maxim was *non sibi soli vivere sed et aliis proficere* (not to live for themselves only, but to serve others). At once contemplative and active, to the complete renunciation of all things they joined the exercise of the apostolic ministry, devoting themselves to the evangelization of the masses, and thus introducing another element into monastic life. A necessary consequence of their close contact with the people, the convents of the mendicants, unlike those of the Benedictines, Cistercians and of the monks generally, were situated in the towns, in which, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, communal life was rapidly developing. Now as Brewer (*Monumenta Franciscana* I, p. xvii) observes, and his words may be applied to all the mendicants, "it was to this class of the population,

in first instance, that the attention of the Franciscan was directed; in these wretched localities (suburbs of the towns) his convent and order were seated. The work of the mendicants in the pulpit, in the confessional, in the service of the sick and the socially weak, in the foreign missions, had no parallel in the Middle Ages.

This same apostolic activity had two consequences, which form further characteristics of the mendicant friars, a new organization of cloistered life and, the adoption of a special means of providing subsistence. The mendicants, unlike the monks, were not bound by a *votum stabilitatis* (vow of permanency) to one convent but enjoyed considerable liberty. Not only might they be called upon to exercise their ministry within the limits of a province, but, with permission of the general, they could be sent all over the world. The form of government itself was rather democratic, as for the most part the superiors were not elected for life and were subject to the General Chapter. From their apostolic ministry the mendicants derived the right of support from all Christian people: *dignus est operarius mercede sua*. (The laborer is worthy of his hire.) It was only just that having left everything in the world in obedience to Christ's counsel ([Matthew](#) 19:21; 16:24; Luke 9:1-6) in order to devote themselves to the well-being of the people, they should look to the people for their support. And in fact those alms were regarded as the due of their apostolic work.

In the Middle Ages the original mendicant orders of friars in the Church were the

- Franciscans (Friars Minor, commonly known as the Grey Friars), founded 1209
- Carmelites, (Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Carmel, commonly known as the White Friars), founded 1206 –1214
- Dominicans (Order of Preachers, commonly called the Black Friars), founded 1215
- Augustinians (Hermits of St. Augustine, commonly called the Austin Friars), founded 1256

The Second Council of Lyons (1274) recognized these as the four "great" mendicant orders, and suppressed certain others. The Council of Trent loosened their property restrictions. Afterwards, except for the Franciscans and their offshoot the Capuchins, members of the orders were permitted to own property collectively as do monks.

Among other orders are the

- Trinitarians (Order of the Most Blessed Trinity), founded 1193
- Mercedarians (Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy), founded 1218
- Servites (Order of Servants of Mary), founded 1233
- Minims (Hermits of St. Francis of Paola), founded 1436
- Capuchins (Order of Friars Minors Capuchins), established 1525
- Discalced Carmelites, founded 1593
- Brotherhood of Saint Gregory (an Anglican Order) founded 1969

II. Evangelical Poverty in the Mendicant Tradition

From the historical facts we can say that, the mendicant depend directly on the charity of the people for their livelihood. In principle they do not own property, either individually or collectively, and have taken a vow of poverty, in order that all their time and energy could be expended on religious work.

The Mendicant Movement responded to widely spread and deeply felt needs of the time. These needs found expression not only in the Mendicant orders within the Church, but also in a number of more or less heretical and revolutionary religious sects. There was this in common among the Cathari, Waldenses, Albigenses and other heretical bodies that overran so many parts of Western Europe in the second half of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th, that they all inveighed against the wealth of the clergy, and preached the practice of austere poverty and a return to the simple life of Christ and the Apostles. Thus the sectaries no less than the Mendicant orders bear witness to the existence of spiritual needs in Western Christendom, which the Mendicant

orders went a long way towards satisfying. Probably the most crying need was that of priests to minister to the great city populations, at that time growing up with such rapidity, especially in Italy. During the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries the Church had been organized on the lines of the prevailing feudal system - the bishops and abbots were feudal barons, and the effects of the system were felt throughout the ranks of the lower clergy. The social fabric was built up not on the towns, but on the great landlords; and when the centre of gravity began to move, first of all in Italy, to the towns, and crowded populations began to be massed together in them, the parochial systems broke down under the weight of the new conditions, and the people were in a state of spiritual and moral no less than physical destitution. So, when the friars came and established themselves in the poorest localities of the towns, and brought religion to the destitute and the outcasts of society, assimilating themselves to the conditions of life of those among whom they worked, they supplied a need with which the parochial clergy were unable to cope.

It was a period of religious revival and of reaction against abuses that followed in the wake of the feudal system; and this religious movement was informed by a new mysticism - a mysticism that fixed its attention mainly on the humanity of Christ and found its practical expression in the imitation of His life. A new intellectual wave was breaking over Western Europe, symbolized by the university and the scholastic movements; and a new spirit of democratic freedom was making itself felt in the growing commercial towns of Italy and Germany.

There is no need to labor the point that the Mendicants responded to all these needs and interpreted them within the pale of Catholic Christianity, for the fact lies upon the surface of history. But a few words are necessary on the central idea from which the Mendicants received their name - the idea of poverty. This was St Francis's root idea, and there is no doubt - though it has been disputed - that it was borrowed from him by St Dominic and the other Mendicant founders. St Francis did not intend that begging and alms should be the normal means of sustenance for his friars; on the contrary, he intended them to live by the work of their hands, and only to have recourse to begging when they could not earn their livelihood by work. But as the friars soon came nearly all to be priests devoted to spiritual ministrations, and the communities grew larger, it became increasingly difficult for them to support themselves by personal work; and so the begging came to play a greater role than had been contemplated by St Francis. But his idea certainly was that his friars should not only practice the utmost personal poverty and simplicity in their life, but that they should have the minimum of possessions - no lands, no funded property, no fixed sources of income. The maintaining of this ideal has proved unworkable in practice.

In the Dominican Order and the others that started as mendicant it has been mitigated or even abrogated. Among the Franciscans themselves it has been the occasion of endless strife, and has been kept alive only by dint of successive reforms and fresh starts, each successful for a time, but doomed always, sooner or later, to yield to the inexorable logic of facts. The Capuchins have made the most permanently successful effort to maintain St Francis's ideal; but even among them mitigations have had to be admitted. In spite, however, of all mitigations the Franciscans have nearly always presented to the world an object lesson in evangelical poverty by the poorness and simplicity of their lives and surroundings.

The rise of the mendicant Orders in the 12th century brought about a significant impact on the life of the Church at large. It offered a new impetus and became a catalyst for change and renewal. Undoubtedly, it offered a new way of life, different from the monastic tradition and the life of the secular clergy.

In the current situation of our society characterized by rapid change and growth, modern communications and technologies, and where faith life is at the bottom or sometimes even absent among the scale of human and personal priorities, one may ask the following questions:

1. Are mendicant Orders still a significant catalyst in the life of the Church? Or maybe it has lost its identity and meaning judging from the declining number of its members.
2. How do we propose to the young people of today this particular choice of life?

3. In the recent years more and more newer foundations are sprouting from the peripheries with strong accent on a more radical life style, it seems to suggest that there is a kind of a reprisal of the medieval age in terms of consecrated life. What does this new element suggests to us?

III. Evangelical Poverty in the Servants of Mary

What could have inspired our seven first Fathers to sell everything they have, left their earthly possessions and dedicated their life in contemplation of God? The *Legenda de origine Ordinis* tells the account of what transpired in the life of these illustrious men that led them in the founding of our Order. The precious pearl which the Gospel proclaimed has been the principal reason for the fundamental option of a life of poverty-detachment in view of a life totally dedicated to the contemplation of God. Their flight from the world, the choice of a small house outside the walls, their transfer to Mount Senario, the exercise of charity in favor of the less fortunate summarizes the descriptive life of these men at the beginning.

The *Legenda* continues to narrate to us the exemplary life of these men, that in their own poverty they were able to embrace and welcome the poverty of the others, always free to assist and help those who need most. According to this 13th century account, Fra Alessio one of the founding friars, a living witness of the holiness of his companions led a simple life, not asking special food and privileges despite his sickness and old age. He led a truly “conventual” and normal life, doing the manual and hard work, going from house to house in order to collect food and money for the needs of the community.

This desire to live a poor life was sealed by the now famous Act of Poverty of 1251 in the chapter held at Mount Senario notarized on October 21, 1251 at Caffaggio, Florence. This Act states that the friars in any period of time, whether directly or indirectly, nor from a personal intervention cannot not own any immovable properties. If any donation will be made from the part of lay-penitent or to the Procurator on behalf of the friars, the said property will be donated immediately to the Pope or the Church of Rome. From the account of the *Legenda* we can say that the poverty undertaken by our first fathers and their followers was a free, deliberate and a collegial act.

Our history would teach us, that the true spirit of renewal happened in the Order when there is a collective conversion rooted in the Gospel, in this case, living a radical life of the *anawim*. This is the principle of *metanoia* and a renewed life. Along the line of history and revision of our Constitutions, one could surmise that the primal spirit of our first seven fathers were retained and enriched as it tries to meet the challenges of the changing times amidst varieties of cultural, social, political, theological and economic milieu.

The guiding spirit of living out the poverty in these contemporary times are outlined to us by the three-fold charismatic intuition handed to us from the foundation of the Order towards its institutionalization: Fraternity, Mary and Service.

Fraternal spirit

In the Servite tradition, work, the sharing of goods and a moderate style of life constitute the witness of poverty voluntarily undertaken by the Servite communities. (Const. 57)

We have chosen to follow the poor Christ and to live in fraternal communion. The sharing of goods (energies, abilities and the fruits of their labor) has been a remarkable expression of this communion, enabling them to live the spirit if the beatitudes. (cf. OSM Const 57b) Fraternal communion also expresses itself through a real solidarity with those friars who may be called by the Spirit to live with the poor and to share their plight and anxieties. (Const. 58)

Marian Spirit

As Servants of Mary, we commit ourselves to witness the gospel in fraternal inspiration, drawing abiding inspiration from Mary (Const. 1). The name “*Servants*” indicated a life on the society’s margin and not at its center, a life among the marginalized. Like Mary, the “*anawim*” of Yahweh, the humble servant of the Lord, the poor know that they possess nothing by themselves and consequently place all their trust in Him. (CG 2007, 10) Our name itself sends a Gospel

message; it is an echo and living memory of the One who called herself a *handmaid* (Luke 1,38), of the one God looked upon because of her “*poverty*” (cf. Luke 1,48).

In the spirit of Service to the Poor

Therefore, we have to see whether we offer our witness of poverty as necessary as it is difficult, in the style of the Blessed Virgin, a woman of modest conditions (cf. Lk 2:24; Lv 12:8) and “profoundly permeated with the spirit of the poor of Yahweh”; whether our poverty is conformed to the evangelical beatitude (cf. Mt 5:3; Lk 6:20); whether we feel sorrow and indignation for the unmeasured growth of poverty in the world and for the multiple forms of social injustice, thus, sensitive to “the cries of the poor” (cf. Jb 34:28; Prv 21:13; Jas 5:4).

Recognizing our own poverty, every Servants of Mary must live with the awareness that our daily bread, while being the gift from God, must also be a fruit of our own work (Const 59). By our work we share the lot of all men who have to toil and sweat in order to live and we, like the Blessed Virgin (cf. Lk 1:51-53), raise our voices in protest on their behalf and share with them the fruits of our labor through a simple and sober life style; and whether we are persuaded that social justice will be obtained only by preaching to both rich and poor, without mystification, the “Gospel of Poverty” (Servants of Magnificat, 18)

The simplicity of our lifestyle, therefore, allows us to enter into communion and integration amidst the people we serve, offering our concrete services and sensitive to the needs of our times. (cf. Const 57c, 60)

IV. Servite Pedagogy and Evangelical Poverty in a Globalized Society

What is Pedagogy?.

The word *pedagogy* comes from the Ancient Greek παιδαγωγέω (paidagōgeō; from παῖς *país*: child and ἄγω *ágō*: lead; literally, "to lead the child"). In Ancient Greece, παιδαγωγός was (usually) a slave who supervised the education of his master's son (girls were not publicly educated). This involved taking him to school (διδασκαλείον) or a gym (γυμνάσιον), looking after him and carrying his equipment (e.g. musical instruments).

The Latin-derived word for pedagogy, education, is nowadays used in the English-speaking world to refer to the whole context of instruction, learning, and the actual operations involved therein, although both words have roughly the same original meaning. In the English-speaking world the term pedagogy refers to the science or theory of educating. The late Malcolm Knowles reasoned that the term *andragogy* is more pertinent when discussing adult learning and teaching. He referred to andragogy as the art and science of teaching adults. The term coined by Malcolm Knowles seemed appropriate since we are dealing here with on-going formation, I would rather stick to the term pedagogy, as a process of whole life development of the human person.

Pedagogy and On-going Formation

In the area of witnessing towards evangelical poverty, the Church has addressed the issue by defining a spirituality rooted in the Gospel values. While, the witnessing sphere has to be grounded in spirituality, the difficulty to confront it at the existential level remains a challenge. Thus, a pedagogy of witnessing in the context of daily life needs to be addressed.

The need to establish a pedagogy

This is an important topic to be dealt with, as on-going formation is continuous learning process of human development. The human person does not cease “*to educate himself to learn to acquire knowledge*” (*docibilitas*) as long as he lives. The new horizon of the society is a learning society, in which it is possible to confront the complexity of daily life, the risk of change, the plurality of roles between men and women, the velocity of change and multiplicity of transitions. Therefore, a learning society is a society that stimulates all its individual members and groups developing continuously their knowledge, capacities and attitudes. As consecrated persons, and as Servants of Mary, we cannot but, open ourselves to new ideas and principles of a changing society. (cf. OSM Const. 107)

Pedagogy in the context of Globalization

Robert Schreiter in his talk *Mission in the Second Decade of Globalization* during the SEDOS Residential Seminar in May 2008 in Ariccia, Italy states that we are in the second decade of globalization. The first decade happened in the 1980's when we have been grappling with this phenomenon. It was not until the collapse of Communism in most countries and the rapid spread of information and communication technologies that globalization began to press itself upon our consciousness as it does today. He further reiterates that sweeping generalizations that might have been acceptable in the early years of experience of globalization should be replaced by a more careful and strategic thinking. Thus, the relative experience should help us to see the patterns and shape policies that will serve our mission.

1. Critical Consciousness and Critical Pedagogy

In this context, critical pedagogy is a necessary tool in our understanding of the present phenomenon. Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach which attempts to help students question and challenge domination, and the beliefs and practices that dominate. In other words, it is a theory and practice of helping students achieve critical consciousness. Critical pedagogue Ira Shor, defines critical pedagogy as

"Habits of thought, reading, writing, and speaking which go beneath surface meaning, first impressions, dominant myths, official pronouncements, traditional clichés, received wisdom, and mere opinions, to understand the deep meaning, root causes, social context, ideology, and personal consequences of any action, event, object, process, organization, experience, text, subject matter, policy, mass media, or discourse." (*Empowering Education*, 129)

In his book, *Critical Pedagogy* (2008, second edition), Joe L. Kincheloe helps us understand the central dynamics of critical pedagogy:

"Advocates of critical pedagogy are aware that every minute of every hour that teachers teach, they are faced with complex decisions concerning justice, democracy, and competing ethical claims. While they have to make individual determinations of what to do in these particular circumstances, they must concurrently deal with what John Goodlad (1994) calls the surrounding institutional morality. A central tenet of critical pedagogy maintains that the classroom, curricular, school structures teachers enter are not neutral sites waiting to be shaped by educational professionals. While such professionals do possess agency, this prerogative is not completely free and independent of decisions made previously by people operating with different values and shaped by the ideologies and cultural assumptions of their historical contexts. These contexts are shaped in the same ways language and knowledge are constructed, as historical power makes particular practices seem natural—as if they could have been constructed in no other way." (Chapter 1) Here are some of the basic concerns of critical pedagogy:

- all education is inherently political and all pedagogy must be aware of this condition
- a social and educational vision of justice and equality should ground all education
- issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and physical ability are all important domains of oppression and critical anti-hegemonic action.
- the alleviation of oppression and human suffering is a key dimension of educational purpose
- all positions including critical pedagogy itself must be problematized and questioned
- education must both promote emancipatory change and the cultivation of the intellect--these goals should never be in conflict, they should be synergistic
- the politics of knowledge and issues of epistemology are central to understanding the way power operates in educational institutions to perpetuate privilege and to subjugate the marginalized--"validated" scientific knowledge can often be used as a basis of oppression as it is produced without an appreciation of how dominant power and culture shape it.

2. Transformative Praxis and Servite Pedagogy

The Servite charism clearly impresses the identity of the Servants of Mary in this specific vocation of *sequela Christi*. The development and institutionalization of the charismatic intuition eventually shaped the form of the spirituality of the Order throughout these years. At this point of our reflection we can talk about two levels of pedagogy: Critical and Servite pedagogy. As critical pedagogy sets the mind in the contextualization and understanding of the events transpiring in the society in order to achieve critical consciousness, the charism of the Order serves as a pedagogical tool in the process of actualization and transformative praxis.

Fraternity

This dimension of our pedagogical structures sets us apart from other religious institutes in the method of addressing current societal issues. We all take initiatives in fraternal communion in terms of decision-making and in its execution. This is clearly manifested in our desire to share everything that we have: goods, persons and even the carrying of each other's burden. In our desire to carry out our commitment to be in solidarity with our less fortunate brethren, we always choose the path towards collaborative ministry and in cases of individual friars who have opted to live the lot of the poor, the community accompanies them by sharing their vision and offering fraternal understanding and concern.

Mary

Mary, our teacher has taught us poverty by assuming the attitude of the poor of Yahweh. By becoming fellow *anawim* we try to follow her example by being attentive to the needs of others as she has done at the wedding at Cana. The act of self-sacrifice and altruism is a pedagogy of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth despite her own delicate condition. The various episodes in the life of Mary is a pedagogical tradition that our seven first Fathers has bestowed upon us their spiritual sons throughout the centuries surpassing unimaginable borders of space, time and culture.

Service

At the heart of our vocation is the call to serve God's people in the peripheries of society. This is our fundamental option. The poor will always be our subject and the protagonist of our charter to service. We are instruments and the poor are our mentors in pedagogy. We have to see, judge and act with the eyes of the poor in our desire to serve the poorest. This is the pedagogy of Christ, that is, by becoming poor himself, he was able to understand his mission.

3. Conclusion

Establishing a pedagogical methodology will enable our friars to evaluate with a critical mind in order to understand the realities around their own communities, the Church and the World and thus plan concrete steps of actions towards resolving, if not all issues, at least part of it.

IV. Mirroring the Challenges of Evangelical Poverty

The Friar and his Community

The poverty of a Servant of Mary is not a choice for personal perfection but rather a fundamental option that one decides to witness in freedom within the context of fraternal life. It demands a profound kenosis and a radical change of life.

"... and, leaving everything, they followed him" (cf. Luke 5, 11). This is the biblical inspiration of the journey of the Order towards a "return to the basics." The *Legenda de Origine* describes how our first fathers took up the path of conversion and follow Christ in the radical way by stripping themselves off of their earthly possessions and how they signed an "Act of Poverty" as a sign of their commitment of possessing nothing so that in their "nakedness they could follow the Lord." (cf. D.M. Turollo).

An overview of the different situations prevailing in the Order leads the General Chapter to see that some communities are committed to growth in communion, through sharing their possessions, while other communities seems less engaged. The call to communion is sometimes frustrated by the individual's use of time and property. (CG 2007, 11)

The independence of friars who have personal bank accounts, their own car, a personal computer with internet connections in their room, cellular telephones or personal televisions

undermines common life. Individuals place more importance on their own property, rather than on what is held in common. When these circumstances prevail, the individual friar spends less time with his brothers. He takes little and infrequent part in the community life. His growing separation from the brothers is camouflaged by a purely formal attendance at common prayer and meals. (CG 2007, 11)

The Friar, his Community and the World (CG 2007, 15)

The General Chapter has made frequent reference to the worldwide phenomenon of economic poverty and the unjust structures that widen the gap between rich and poor. We declare this growing gap unacceptable.

Pope Paul VI's warning in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (March 26, 1967) is still valid: we must build a human community where people enjoy *a truly human life* and *where the needy Lazarus can sit down with the rich man at the same banquet table* (no. 47). The sufferings of our brothers and sisters throughout the world call out to us.

We see the faces of many people: those caught in war; children who are victims of violence, hunger, abuse and abandonment; women who are raped, bought and sold; native people who have been deprived of land, culture and faith; refugees and migrants who are looking for survival and dignity; prisoners who crowd the world's countless prisons; the sick who show us our own fragility and who are often the victims of blind interests, epidemics or the pandemic of AIDS; the face of workers whose jobs are precarious and without guarantees and who have little hope for a better future; the faces of unborn babies.

A wounded humanity has thousands of other faces that demand our respect, people who have the right to live and share in building a new, more just and fraternal world. (GC 2007, 15)

The Friar, his Community, the World and Globalization

One of the myths of globalization is that it brings prosperity to people and to our planet; however, the reality tells another story. The term globalization encompasses a range of social, political, and economic changes. Some disciplines including anthropology or sociology focus on cultural changes of growing interconnectedness, such as the expansion of brands like Nike and McDonalds, and the increasing ease of travel. Other disciplines such as economics track the exchange of finances, goods and services through expanding global markets. Still other disciplines such as political science examine the role of international political institutions like the United Nations and the increasing power of transnational corporations. While one can try to dissect each of these topics to measure the changes of globalization, they are woven together in a complex manner, making it difficult to summarize positive or negative effects. Globalization creates new markets and wealth, even as it causes widespread suffering, disorder, and unrest. It is both a source of repression and a catalyst for global movements of social justice and emancipation. Globalization is strengthened by the growing obsession for economic growth in terms of technological and capital investment, often to the detriment of the human growth of individuals and societies.

This is an area where we are called to witness and work extensively – the so-called macro-reality of human existence. This is the call to mission, a new way of witness of our fundamental option for evangelical poverty, without passion for humanity, there is no poverty.

The Friar, his Community, the World, Globalization and the 2007 General Chapter

The General Chapter of 2007 outlined to us the inspirational guidelines as we continue our journey amidst these times of crises. The most important result indeed of this General Chapter is a realization throughout the Order that any solution to our current crisis necessarily involves a

renewed and determined option for evangelical poverty. By embracing once more and making poverty our story, we can better witness our faith and our *sequela Christi*.

The final document of the General Chapter reiterated the richness of the final text of the Pre-Chapter Commission on *Witness to Evangelical Poverty* as a good point of departure for reflection. I am re-proposing the said text and with a hope that this time, this document will be seen from another perspective and eventually would lead our friars and communities to make concrete choices and to make poverty history.

1. Poverty as Freedom to Follow Christ

1.1. Poverty, is above all, an offer of freedom:

It frees us from the idols of today, of the temptation to place our security and our happiness in things and goods, in the values and mentality of this world.

It frees us for contemplation, teaching us to limit our requirements, convinced that it is better to have fewer needs than to possess more things (cf. *Regula 18*),

It frees us from the need to possess in our relationship with things, so that we discover that we can love and use them without needing to own them.

It frees us for service to God and mankind, which is the real aim of the one who is poor and who belongs not to himself but to a project that is larger than he is, thereby inviting us to travel lightly, in accordance with evangelical itinerancy and without superfluous baggage, ready to go where our service impels us (cf. *Const. 3*), belonging to the Kingdom and not to our own plans.

It frees us from worry about the top places, and invites us to value the evangelical dimension of lowliness, humility, weakness, to become like little children, the least and the servants of all.

It frees us from transient attractions, calling us to a sober, essential lifestyle of radical simplicity.

It frees us from the risk of compensating unhappiness with the illusion of possessions and the accumulation of material goods.

It frees us from cares, reminding us that God provides for all our needs, that our task is to seek his face. Thus it recalls us to faithfulness to our origins, to our founding mendicant and contemplative inspiration

1.2. Question: **Why I must be poor?**

1.3. Suggested Concrete Options: **Making Poverty a Fundamental Choice**

- Adopt a more sober, essential and simple style of living
- Adopt a modest style of life that is evidenced by the house, diet, means of transport and communication. Cut down on demands and do not seek out the latest technological innovations.
- Live in a joyful and complete communion of goods among the members of the community, with full confidence in the community itself.
- Do not keep any kind of personal accumulation or bank account that is not shared in the community.
- Carry out a periodic revision in chapter concerning fidelity to the commitment of personal and community poverty.
- Earn one's keep by remunerated employment, according to each friar's ability and education, so that apostolic service is as far as possible free.
- Do the manual work of the house, avoiding or reducing paid staff.
- Take care of the maintenance and beauty of the houses where we live.
- Learn how to make a periodic analysis of the social, economic, cultural and ecclesial situation, so that our responses are modern and pertinent. Ask the aid of experts in this.
- Live the ministry of reconciliation and of compassion for the sick as forms of solidarity with people suffering in body and spirit.

- Courageously support, with the community's resources, the projects for the promotion of social groups that are at greater risk promoted by the Order or other ecclesial or civil organizations.

- Encourage the acquisition of educational books and magazines for community rather than individual use.

- Make a commitment to reduce expenditure and consumption by the community by a percentage agreed on in chapter (e.g., 10%).

- Devolve a percentage (e.g. 50%) of the annual surplus of each community and jurisdiction to solidarity projects.

- *In formation*: prepare candidates for manual work.

- Educate them in an awareness of the cost of living.

- Value and transmit the mendicant tradition.

- Teach them the financial administration of a community.

- Teach them a sober lifestyle rather than the automatic satisfaction of all needs.

- Educate them to use the means at their disposal for the edification of the community.

Goods are not for ourselves alone; they are instruments whereby to do something for others.

- *For apostolic service*: be near to people through openness, listening, sharing their conditions of living, with an attitude of thankfulness and service.

- Be a neighbour to all, accepting them for who they are and not for what they possess, excluding no one and working particularly in the inter-faith and multicultural spheres.

- Abandon roles of power and self-affirmation, giving preference to collaboration, especially with laypeople.

- Adopt collegiality at all levels as our specific form of service.

- Use poor means, evangelising by means of this method of apostolate.

- Exercise poverty through apostolic service carried out as a community, sharing weaknesses and gifts.

- Adopt a project of radical poverty as a form of closeness and solidarity with the poorest realities.

2. Poverty as Freedom for Fraternity

2.1. Poverty means having something and offering it as a gift, making all that we are and all that we possess an instrument of communion. So it frees us from the logic of competition and allows us to enter into that of relationship and free gift.

It frees us, reminding us that goods are gifts received. Things do not belong to us, but to God and others. As we have received them, so others should receive them for us. It reminds us that the community grows and develops through the sharing of charisms, the exchange of material and spiritual gifts, the communion of goods, putting everything at the service of our vocation to love, not thinking of ourselves but rather of our brothers.

It frees us from attitude of autonomy and self-sufficiency so that we discover that the strength of fraternity lies in reciprocal dependence.

It frees us by calling us to account for everything in community, with open transparency and responsibility.

It frees us from empty theories, calling upon us to fulfill the Constitutions in the concrete practicalities of everyday life.

The choice of poverty allows us, by living by the fruits of our work (*Const.* 59) to share the lot of the men and women of our day, their experience of precariousness and hard work.

It reminds us to see ourselves as part of a wider fraternity, the human family, requiring of us a moderate style in all aspects of our life (cf. *Const.* 57).

2.2. **Question: Does my community live in total and loyal communion of goods among its members?**

2.3. Suggested Concrete Options: **Making Poverty a way to Fraternity**

- Put in common not only the resources but also the necessities and needs of the communities, so as to tackle them together.
- Some social projects of the communities can be shared and supported at provincial level.
- Put in common the surplus of every community for the support of the poorer fraternities, formation and projects of solidarity.
- Every jurisdiction should analyse its economic situation, with projections of possible future scenarios, with attention to the social reality where it is living and in consideration of the decrease, dramatic in some places, in Mass offerings and stole fees.
- The young jurisdictions should make a greater effort to achieve economic self-sufficiency, in the awareness that the flow of assistance will lessen as the resources of the 'old' jurisdictions diminish.
- Encourage and accompany communities making a radical choice of poverty.
- Every jurisdiction should make an effort to have at least one community in an area of poverty.
- The provinces with more resources can offer scholarships for study to friars from the poorer jurisdictions by guaranteeing them hospitality in a community or granting financial support towards their academic fees.

3. Poverty as Freedom for Solidarity

3.1. Many friars consider that the new name for poverty is solidarity. Poverty calls on us to identify with the poor and be spokespersons for them in society.

- It frees us from the false values suggested by the general mentality, making us a prophetic voice about many modern economic realities: consumerism, neo-liberalism, exploitation, globalization, impoverishment of the planet, consumption of the sources of energy, etc.

- It frees us from the illusion that we can live on our own, developing a social conscience and sensitivity towards justice and peace problems in the world.

- It calls us to insist on an analysis of the real situation in order guide and direct our responses to people's needs (cf. *Const. 76c*).

- The choice of poverty makes us free to take up new forms of service to the most needy people in the contemporary world.

3.2. Question: **How much of the resources of my community devolve to the poor?** (Const. 62) **Is it enough?**

3.3. Suggested Concrete Options: **Making Poverty History**

- The Provinces must consider themselves committed to supporting generously the communities at the service of the Order.

- Create a fund of solidarity through the participation, in different degrees, of all jurisdictions.

- Define the forms for developing sharing between the jurisdictions having greater resources and those who are poorer.

- Establish a Solidarity Day at Order level (e.g., the Commemoration of All Saints of the Order).

- Increase taxation on the sale of goods to benefit the Order.

- Use empty premises for the needs of immigrants.

- Promote, co-ordinate, integrate more into the life of the Order the work for “Justice and Peace” and the defence of human rights, arriving at the creation of a General Secretariat.
- Become committed to the weaker groups in society, the rights of women, the Aids drama in Africa, the situation in Sudan, etc.
- Be vigilant that investments and the management of our resources are carried out in an ethical and responsible way.
- Support fair trade schemes and ethical banks where they exist.
- Wars create conditions of huge suffering and poverty. The Order must commit itself strongly to the theme of peace.
- Nourish in the Order awareness and commitment in the sphere of ecology and the defence of natural resources.
- Consider a document from the Order on Marian spirituality and social engagement.
- Every Province, or all the Order, should promote a large-scale common social project, such as, for example, in defence of the Amazon forest in Bolivia, Brazil and Peru, or in defence of the resources of water in Aysén, Chile.

IV. Making Poverty History (in my Community, Vicariate, Province and the Order)

This particular segment of the reflection paper encourages everyone to identify areas of concern regarding the problem of poverty in its own jurisdiction.

The General Chapter 2007 (25) proposes the following:

a) At year’s end, each community and province should determine how much money they will contribute to the Order and the poor (cf. *Const.* 62, 289c) and to projects of the General Council. This determination should be made in agreement with the Prior Provincial and his Council. Priors and Vicars Provincial should meet with the Prior General and his Council to determine how the moneys will be distributed. The Prior General and his Council should study ways of alleviating the enormous international debt that cripples so many nations in the world.

b) In canonical visitations, the Prior General and the Prior Provincial should review and handle firmly the following situations: the use of money – how it is spent or saved; what sort of life-style prevails in the community; what care is devoted to the house and the environment.

c) Through the community chapter, the conventual Prior should help the community realize the demands of poverty; he should be firm in denouncing abuse, inattention or indifference. The local chapter should determine the community’s life-style and see that it is appropriate to the area where it is located. We must avoid a contradictory life-style (expensive possessions; showy personal property; the latest technology – computers, cameras, cell phones, vacations and holidays in expensive locations). All these are counterproductive to our witness.

Every jurisdiction, is encouraged to come up with micro-project (s) along the area of poverty, as their fundamental option starting 2009.

This secretariat will seek collaboration with the General Secretariat for the Evangelization of Peoples and Justice and Peace, who will help the different jurisdictions and the General Council in the identification and monitoring of needs of and projects for the poor. A full report of the already established and on-going projects will be compiled for documentation and mutual exchange of information among the different jurisdictions of the Order.

V. Servite Act of Contrition

As a sign of renewing our vow to live evangelical poverty, we must take into heart the recitation of this act of contrition in our community prayers as a reminder of our fraternal commitment to the vocation we received from God. (GC 2007, 14)

*In the name of the Order, I, FRA ,
ask forgiveness of God for failing in living and practicing my evangelical vow of poverty.*

I ask forgiveness of the poor for not listening to them;

for remaining silent when I should have spoken in their defense;

*for ignoring them when, throughout the world, they sat at our doors – like Lazarus –
begging for bread and fraternity.*

*I ask pardon of the poor for the money I may have given them with neither love nor
justice.*

May the Almighty God help me. Amen.

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