



*The Spirituality of
International Economic Solidarity
in the Capuchin Order*

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At home in a divided world

The Gospels not only present us with a vision of the Kingdom of God. They develop the vision, mostly against the background of real life. And so, we hear about political power systems (Mt 20, 25; Mt 2,16) and about making a business out of religion (Mt 21,12f) but also about unemployment (Mt 20,3) and refugees (Mt 2,14), about corruption and exploitation (Lk 18,1; Lk 19,8). The Gospel also says much about incurable sickness (Lk 8,43) and the lack of social solidarity (Jn 5,7; Lk 10,31f). The beatitudes of Jesus are every bit as concrete in their language as his “woe to you” sayings (Lk 6,20-26).

In every encounter with this Jesus, however, salvation and healing occur again and again. Not only does He use the image of the wedding feast: he joins the guests, invites people to the supper and is still our host today in the Eucharist – images and reality of a communion which, in God’s name, overcomes the divisions that exist among people.



We still await the final coming of God’s kingdom. By the same token we know that our life and our world are permeated with sin and the structures of sin. The VII Plenary Council of the Order (PCO) talks simplistically about “an unfair concentration of wealth, which causes a large number of migrants; arrogance; narcissistic preoccupation with self-fulfilment; self-serving powers that marginalize the poor and destroy the environment; relationships marked by domination and social stratification; ethnocentrism and religious intolerance,”¹

¹ Cf. PCO VII, 6

Challenged to build bridges

This VII Plenary Council of Assisi in 2004 had minority and itinerancy as its theme. It developed an eminently active concept of these basic Franciscan attitudes.² It never allows you to think for a moment that Franciscan *minoritas* can be described exclusively in terms of humility and submissiveness, or even as a kind of collective inferiority complex. Starting on the basis of the Trinity, minority unfolds as an active virtue, meant to build up relationships. And so, Proposal 6 goes on to say:

“ Franciscan minority today demands courageous choices for a more fraternal world:

- The choice of a fraternal economy everywhere we live and serve (cf. PCO VI).
- Other-centered relationships.
- A culture of peace based on the confident choice of vulnerability.
- Leadership and pastoral action based on service and participation.
- An ethic of justice based on the fact that we are all brothers and sisters.
- A new commitment to dialogue in the spirit of Francis. (cf. RnB XVI, 5-6).³

“Building Communion in a world of Asymmetrical Relationships”⁴ was the title of the first circular letter of Br John Corriveau, in which he commented on the event of PCO VII. If we consider the work of solidarity in the Capuchin Order in this context, its significance deepens as an instrument for the growth of the Order, not just materially but also, and especially, in a spiritual perspective.

² Cf. PCO VII, 2a

³ Cf. PCO VII, 6

⁴ John Corriveau, Circular Letter No. 23, ‘To his likeness’, Building Communion in a world of asymmetrical relationships, AOFMCap, 2005, p. 11.

Solidarity out of the past, for the future

The work of Solidarity in its present form arose out of the VI Plenary Council, also held in Assisi in 1998 on the theme of “Living Poverty in Brotherhood”. At first one might be tempted to consider all the developments in this area since 1999 as an expansion of the “Mission assistance” system that had been in existence for many years. Ever since Bernhard Christen of Andermatt, General Minister of the Capuchins from 1884 to 1908, under whom the friars’ missionary commitment once again took root in the Order, there was, in addition to the main pillar of missionary responsibility of the Provinces, a constant concern for the Missions on the part of the Order as a whole, in other words, through the General Curia. The General Mission Secretary represented the Order at Propaganda Fide und represented Missionaries in the general administration of the Order. He was able to be financially active, because 25% of the income from the “Seraphic Mass Association”, founded in 1899 by the Swiss Tertiary Frieda Folger for the support of the Capuchin foreign missions, was sent to Rome. The remaining 75% financed the work of the local mission offices or secretariats. In the second half of the 20th century, more active fund-raising methods began to be adopted. In this way the Order’s financial means grew, at the same time as its needs.⁵

A “Mission Commission” was already meeting regularly in Rome in the 80’s. In addition to allocating the comparatively modest sums available, this commission was more and more involved in discussions about the shape of Franciscan missionary activity.⁶ At that time, Br. John Corriveau was a member of this commission, which pressed for a further development of the central mission support system. At Pentecost 1991, General Minister Flavio Roberto Carraro, after consulting all the Major Superiors, announced the establishment of a “Central Mission Fund”.⁷

5 One might perhaps ask whether it was a case of dependency in reverse?

6 In 1978, the III Plenary Council in Mattli (Switzerland) on missionary activity had stressed some important principles.

7 Prot. Nr.: 00787/91

Globalisation o many fronts

In addition to the growth of the Order in the South and the Far East, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 changed the Capuchin landscape. Freed from communism, brothers who had survived persecution and oppression “behind the iron curtain”, in faithfulness to their religious vocation, were back on the scene. Brothers who had had to live as employed members of the “working class” returned to completely ruined friaries to resume community life. Formerly autonomous provinces came back to life, though without the survival structures they once had. Large numbers of vocations required adequate accommodation and formation. New ventures in new places lacked the necessary infrastructure. Without help from outside nothing was possible here, and the joy at having “found our brothers once again” was shown in the generous financial help which flowed, first from the General Curia itself and predominantly from the then KDP and PNVB Conferences. In 1994, additional funds began to be collected for Eastern Europe in the Order as a whole. In 1995, a special Commission for Economic Solidarity in Central and Eastern Europe was set up, and a Project Manager appointed to distribute the funds.

After the Second Vatican Council, the former “mission territories” in the South and the Far East increasingly became independent local Churches. In the Order, too, autonomous jurisdictions arose in the former “missions”, and their number grew very rapidly (e.g. in India) through territorial divisions and the sending of brothers into other places. These “third generation” jurisdictions lacked a “Mother Province” able to provide for them financially, as did the newly liberated provinces of the Order in the East, which very soon began to undertake their own missionary commitments. Many therefore appealed to the General administration of the Order, which attempted to organise a fair distribution of available resources, and these efforts at first led to the establishment of the “Central Mission Fund”. Then, in 1999, assistance for Eastern Europe and assistance from the “Central Mission Fund” were merged into the International Economic Solidarity Commission.

In 1995 some 2.65 million dollars were distributed for

The motto of my venerable predecessor Pope Pius XII was: *Opus Justiae pax, peaces as the fruit of justice.* Today one could say whit the same exactitude and the same force of the Bivblical insiration (Is 32,17; James 3,18): *Opus Justiae Pax, peace as the fruit of solidarity*

John Paul II, Sollicitudo rei socialis, 39





Projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America, as well as approximately 1.3 million dollars for Eastern Europe, while in 2002 the central funding of all the Order's projects reached a total of US \$ 5.5 M. Further resources were constantly added and distributed in the form of study bursaries for students of the International College of St. Laurence of Brindisi in Rome.

By the year 2005 the Order had distributed a total of approximately US\$ 6,1 M.⁸ In addition to helping 58 projects, this money financed the living costs of 184 missionaries in 15 countries, the initial formation of over 2000 young brothers in four continents and the post-graduate formation of nearly 80 students at the International College of San Lorenzo in Rome.

Unfortunately, the fascination of figures can distract attention from another development that often goes unnoticed by both the givers and the receivers in the Capuchin Order, but which I as "Promoter of Solidarity" see as the most significant change.

Evangelisation in Solidarity and evangelising Solidarity

In 1999, the Statutes for "International Economic Solidarity"⁹ brought in a fundamentally new structure for the Order's work of Solidarity. An "Office of International Economic Solidarity" was set up, with the administration in the hands of the secretary. In practice he is supported by an assistant. They administer the incoming projects and the process of assessing them and also prepare the session where the funds are distributed. They also administer payment of the allocated funds. The Project Managers

8 The weakness of the dollar is a relevant factor here. Compared with the year 2002 it had lost approximately 20% of its value. The sum of 900.000 Euro for the International College is also included in this amount.

9 Confirmed in the General Definitory Meeting of 23rd March 1999, and later by the General Chapter in 2000, AOFMCAp 2000, 74-80. Revised and confirmed in the General Definitory Meeting of January 13, 2006.

(currently 3 in number) examine the requests, assess whether they fall under one of our priorities and check that the documentation is complete. They present the projects to the allocating commission, and on the basis of their own knowledge are usually able to answer any questions relating to the projects. If they propose that a project should be supported they suggest an appropriate sum. The brother known as the "Promoter of Solidarity" is also a member of the Office. It is interesting that he is not called the "Promoter of International **economic** Solidarity", but simply "Promoter of Solidarity". Though it is part of his duty to ensure that the necessary funding is available, his mandate goes beyond the purely economic aspect.

The fact that he is at the same time Mission Secretary of the Order links "international economic solidarity" with the missionary mandate of the Capuchin Order and the specific "mission" of the Order, as specified in the Constitutions and other documents. It is in this two-fold role that he attends meetings both of the Office and of the Commission. His contribution is determined by his knowledge of the brothers' situation and also by his involvement with the missionary commitment of the Capuchins to the Church's mission.

It follows that his success or failure are not to be judged by the amount of money available for distribution. Five or six million dollars are not automatically good for the mission, the Church and the Order. The question: "what shall we do with it?" and "how shall we relate to it?" are questions we can never stop asking. It has to do with the spirit in which money is given and received. This is the only way to avoid the inherent dynamic of money quickly leading to greed and so becoming a false god.

The work of solidarity can be summarised in a short formula as follows: The promotion of solidarity is a service given to foster evangelisation in solidarity, and a form of solidarity that preaches the gospel. It is therefore not just a question of what is built, organized and in general achieved for evangelisation with all the money received. The work of solidarity is itself a way of spreading the gospel. Proposal 46 (PCO VII) expressly calls it a model of redeemed

relationships“ for the world. It is a message for people who suffer as a result of asymmetrical relationships. It is an invitation to partake of the meal, hosted by the one Lord and Master who says to the guests: “You are all brothers” (cf. Mt 23,8-12). John Paul II stressed the need for evangelisation by positive example: “If the Church is to reveal her true face to today’s world, she urgently needs such fraternal communities, which, by their very existence, contribute to the new evangelization, inasmuch as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the “new commandment”¹⁰

The “value added” component of International Economic Solidarity

For the first time in the history of the Order, and as far as I know also of the Church’s helping agencies, it is not only the “donors” who sit as members of the distributing Commission.¹¹ The International Economic Solidarity Commission is composed of 10-12 members. At the present time they are evenly distributed between the donor nations and the receiving nations. If you include in that number the President and the Vice-President, plus two members of the General Definitory, then the proportion is 6 to 8 in favour of those who are normally on the side of the “receivers”.

It is not insignificant that the asymmetrical relationships of our world are influenced by possessions. Money is power, and everybody knows how much power rules the world! To give up this power and discuss the use of available resources together with the needy is a prophetic response that flows from the Franciscan spirit.

Many brothers have reservations about the central distribution of resources. It is certainly not because they have no heart for the poor. It is estimated that the funds distributed through International Solidarity

in Rome represent, at most, one quarter of the overall sum made available by or through the Capuchins for evangelisation, the growth of the Order and social commitments.¹² For many, however, this simply raises the question of why one should do centrally what has so far functioned very well in a decentralised fashion. But, as explained above, solidarity in the Capuchin Order is not just a matter of centralising the available funds. It is also not simply the result of a will to power on the part of the central administration, creating the means to implement its “political goals” by demanding contributions. When money is allocated, things do not happen in Rome in exactly the same way as in the provincial houses and mission secretariats. A million dollars is always a million dollars, whether it comes from Rome or anywhere else. But the way it is distributed is different, and this is what gives International Solidarity a ‘value-added’ factor¹³.

We are quite certainly entitled to view these arrangements in the Capuchin Order from the perspective of poverty. PCO VI on ‘Living Brotherhood in Poverty’ rightly took away from us Franciscans all anxiety about money, while awakening in us a ‘fear’ of its misuse. PCO VII on Minority complements these considerations from the viewpoint of power. It states that we, like all other human beings, exercise power.¹⁴ This recognition encourages us not simply to suppress power as a factor in our lives, but always to analyse our own power critically as true lesser brothers. Power itself is not bad, but rather its misuse. Whoever generously distributes money and supports projects, keeping nothing for himself

12 The General chapter 2000 decided to establish a database of all the money transfers between Capuchin jurisdictions. This possibility to make known the support given to others is not yet used by all circumscription of the Order.

13 “Our solidarity towards the least ones and the suffering is also well expressed in social and charitable works or structures” (Proposition 25). Reading Proposal 11 parallel to this, we can also add this consideration: “The poor will not be evangelised through power, but through the experience of brotherhood.” John Corriveau, Circular No.16, (5.4) Thoughts on the VI Plenary Council, Part Three, ‘The Poor are our Teachers’. Italian text in AOFMCAp, 1999, p. 261.

14 Cf. PCOVII, 18

10 John Paul II., *Vita consecrata* 45

11 At Propaganda Fide there is also sharing by everyone. The money collected on World Mission Sunday is distributed by the presidents of all the national pontifical agencies throughout the world.





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and passing everything on, precisely that person is a powerful man or woman. We are all susceptible to influence. We follow our preferences, we prefer certain things and people and are in a very individual way at the mercy of our own moods. A Jesuit mission procurator once told me that he was influenced in his readiness to help by the time his visitors arrived in his office. If they turned up during normal office hours, the petitioner would be questioned and treated to a well-motivated refusal of his request. But if a missionary bishop arrived during siesta time, he could be relatively sure of receiving some direct aid. All the Jesuit really wanted was to get back to his well-deserved midday rest as soon as possible. No need for a long conversation there! This is a harmless example, but it shows how susceptible we are. The principle of participation that operates in Capuchin solidarity is one example of how to prevent the misuse of power.

Solidarity: a challenge for all

The Promoter fosters solidarity in the Order not just among the brothers who know how to make resources available. Naturally he does turn to these and asks for their generous and trusting support of the needs of the entire Order by way of international economic solidarity.

But he also asks for solidarity from those who hitherto have enjoyed unrestricted support from their partners in the North and the West. Many Provinces in Europe and North America are financially supporting the life and work of up to four other circumscriptions in the Order. If the "mother" (or partner) now gives a share of its financial resources to the needs of the entire Order, there will automatically be less available for the hitherto privileged "sons" (partners). They too will be asked to contribute to solidarity, since they are sharing what was hitherto available to them alone. They do this by making do with a smaller allocation, and even by renouncing some good and valuable projects.¹⁵

¹⁵ cf. John Paul II., Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 39: "The exercise of solidarity within each society is valid when its members recognize one another as persons.

Furthermore, the Promoter places great importance on the fact that those who receive benefits are obliged to contribute to solidarity. It cannot simply be a matter of ensuring the biggest possible slice of the cake. Among Capuchins, it must not turn into a "battle of distribution" Solidarity of the receiving parties requires:

- Giving some thought to the effort that goes into collecting the resources.
- Being aware that the money is often the gift of the poor "little ones", who contribute out of the little they have, like the widow in the Gospel.
- Knowing that the money they receive cannot be available to another brother.
- Similarly, receivers are also challenged to act in solidarity with the entire Order when they plan their projects and present their requests.

Very concretely this means that the principle given in the Constitutions (67,3) is also applicable in this field, namely, "the minimum necessary, not the maximum allowed." General Minister Br. John Corriveau in Circular Letter 24 has pointed out that in the past the aspect of austerity was perhaps not sufficiently mentioned because it was already a basic requirement of the Constitutions. But without austerity, the system of solidarity itself is fundamentally at risk.¹⁶ Francis

Those who are more influential, because they have a greater share of goods and common services, should feel responsible for the weaker and be ready to share with them all they possess. Those who are weaker, for their part, in the same spirit of solidarity, should not adopt a purely passive attitude or one that is destructive of the social fabric, but, while claiming their legitimate rights, should do what they can for the good of all. The intermediate groups, in their turn, should not selfishly insist on their particular interests, but respect the interests of others."

¹⁶ Cf. John Corriveau, Circular 24 (6.2): "In a world increasingly controlled by the "proliferation of desire," an economy without austerity leaves nothing for solidarity: "Marketing and advertising collapse the distinction between necessity and superfluity. The reach of need and want run to infinity. The consumer is trained to exceed his/her satisfaction and to desire an infinite array of goods, products and services."1 Equity without austerity leaves nothing for solidarity! Austerity is a constitutive element of a truly "fraternal" economy."

himself said “I was never a thief. By that I mean that, from the alms which are the inheritance of the poor, I always accepted less than I needed, so as not to defraud the other poor.”¹⁷ On the other hand, the brothers “should not be ashamed (to ask for alms), because our Lord made Himself poor for us in this world”. (cf. *Later Rule*, 6,3).

In connection with PCO VI and the work of international economic solidarity the phrase “the right of the brother” is often heard. It seems to be a Franciscan characteristic that no-one claims this right for himself, but that one always fights for the right of the other. Only then can justice flow from rights.

Here the function of the Promoter of Solidarity as Mission secretary once again comes in useful. He is a reminder of the mission of the Order and makes sure that the money that is available does not have a counter-productive effect. He reminds people of the Order’s basic principles, in the context of which international economic solidarity has to be seen:

- Solidarity lived with the brothers (Const. 67,6)
- Solidarity of personnel (Const. 131,4; 176,4)
- Inculturation of the gospel (Const. 177,3)
- Dialogue with Religions (Const.175,4)
- Solidarity lived with the poor (Const. 59,5; 60,4+5)

It is important that we increasingly consider Solidarity in the context of the poor. “International solidarity should neither uproot us from our societies nor compromise our cultural bonds” (PCO VI, 24b).

Here the General Minister is quoting from: David B. Couturier, OFM Cap, Formation for the Fraternal Economy in the Capuchin Franciscan Order: A Psychological Analysis. Unpublished doctoral thesis (2005) p. 93.

¹⁷ Francis of Assisi –LP111.

Not a source of money, but of fraternity

From all that we have said I hope it is clear that international economic solidarity in the Capuchin Order is not simply just another helping agency, only this time a Capuchin one. Unfortunately it is still (mis)understood in that way by far too many people. So, for many it seems to make no sense that they are asked to make an obligatory contribution of \$3,000 to solidarity, when they receive \$23,000 as an initial formation subsidy. If you make comparisons with the helping agencies, such a system is bound to seem less than sensible. The point is that solidarity in the Capuchin Order definitely does not wish to be just another agency, an anonymous source of money.

The “fraternal economy”, promoted in the Order in the wake of PCO VI, has as one of its pillars a centralised administration. What is sometimes perceived as alienating at the general level, is understandable as a solidarity project on the provincial level. A fraternity with good income is no better than one in a poor area. All income is available to everyone and is distributed according to real need. A community of solidarity comes about, radiating outwards from the local fraternity and giving everyone the possibility of doing or receiving what is necessary. Similarly, surpluses can then also be passed on beyond the borders of the province.

International economic solidarity represents the centralised economy on a world-wide level. Even though all provinces and vice-provinces in the Order, sometimes in a symbolic way, are first asked to pay into the common fund. All are active members of this communion of solidarity. No-one is simply a receiver. The first step lies in making available, in sharing. A second step is then to decide who needs help. In the process it can happen that only a part of a sum can be authorised, or a project may have to be refused altogether. At this point all abide by the commission’s decision, knowing that it always conscientiously tries to approve the most necessary projects.

It is all very fine for the promoter of solidarity when he is greeted and treated as an





important helper. At best, he is a catalyst, who fosters and strengthens the network of solidarity in the Order. The real helpers are the brothers: those who share, and that's nearly all of them, but also those brothers who forego presenting a project or who only receive part of the financing or who even receive a rejection. Where this is recognised and accepted, international economic solidarity becomes a tool, not just of material but especially spiritual growth in the Capuchin Order. Then it creates bonds that span frontiers and continents. Then, money serves not the concentration of power and the promotion of personal interests, but patently builds a world of brother/sisterhood, and of justice. Whenever this succeeds, solidarity is building communion in a world of asymmetrical, unequal relationships, and becomes a sign of hope for humanity. And then, our greatest achievement is not what we do with the money, but how we relate to money.

Dream along with me...

The dream is one side of the coin, and reality another: we are on the way, we have not yet reached the goal. In reality, solidarity also receives external help through the General Curia. We rely for the support of our projects on agencies, foundations and individual benefactors. We gratefully acknowledge that solidarity is another form of globalisation that is practiced by many. The fact that we specifically remember our benefactors in the Office and at Mass and consciously pray for them must never become a ritual. Gratitude does not dispense us from responsibility as followers of Francis. In fact it spurs us on to live authentic lives.

The sense of wonder at the multiplication of the loaves in St John's gospel should be infectious (6, 1-13). Philip says "200 denarii would not be enough for each one to get a small piece." The adult's calculations are one side of the coin: the young boy's spontaneous readiness is the other. He offers what little he has: five loaves and two fishes. He keeps nothing anxiously back for himself. He stretches out his hand, with its gift, to his brothers and sisters. He builds communion

in an unequal world. And with God's blessing, the miracle happens: All have their fill!

All the brothers are called to become young again as they follow Francis, to be generous, to offer what they have, and to let go. Where no-one anxiously hoards, then with the Lord's blessing all can have their fill. Incidentally, the gospel says that twelve basketsful of scraps were left over – a prophetic sign of hope for all. Similarly, a million dollars is actually not the same as a million dollars. Given in the spirit of international solidarity, that sum increases. Value is added on, which fills not just people's hands, but their hearts. All can have their fill, in every sense. This is a prophetic sign which our world is hungry for. "Opus solidaritatis pax" – the fruit of solidarity is peace.¹⁸

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Rome, 23.09.2005
(Feast of Bl. P. Pio of Pietrelcina)

18 cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 39: "The motto of the pontificate of my esteemed predecessor Pius XII was *Opus iustitiae pax*, peace is the fruit of justice. Today one could say, with the same exactness and the same power of biblical inspiration (cf. Is 32:17; Jas 3:18): *Opus solidaritatis pax*, peace is the fruit of solidarity."

