

FIFTH PLENARY COUNCIL

on

OUR PROPHETIC PRESENCE

IN THE WORLD:

APOSTOLIC LIFE AND ACTIVITY

GARIBALDI

1986

PRESENTATION

Dear Brothers,

Only now can we present to you the Document of PCO V “Our prophetic presence in the world: our apostolic life and activity”. You have been waiting for it for several months. The Document was first of all revised by a Redaction Committee, and we wanted to wait for a full meeting of the Definitory before approving it. This was only possible recently because of our many commitments in the service of the Order.

Firstly, we wish to underline one aspect of the value of the Document. It is only a small part of a larger work in which our fraternities have been involved for nearly three years, and will be involved for many years to come, which we hope will bear lasting fruit throughout the Order. The Document brings together only what the delegates of all the Conferences, and the General Definitory, perceived and expressed in the unforgettable meeting held in September 1986 in Brazil.

From this point of view we are aware that we are presenting our confreres with a limited and imperfect piece of work. Nonetheless, we now make it our own and we entrust it to each and every one of our brothers, so that they may profit by its inspirations and be urged on even by its limitations to continue their quest and their journey.

We wish to share with you our conviction that the Plenary Councils have had an important role in our recent history. They are a new instrument by means of which we have been able to listen to the ideas and sentiments of the brothers all over the world, in a way which is new, fraternal and effective. Our Order, in its life and in its writings, beginning with the Constitutions, would not be what it is today without the growing change and ferment which we have been able to harvest from Quito, Taizé, Mattli, Rome and now Garibaldi.

From the beginning of the preparation for PCO V one of the principal lines of approach was to listen to and indeed to “challenge” the brothers, without determining schemes and methods in advance, and without closing any doors. We have been surprised at what has been expressed, and we are certain that much remains to be brought to light. The Holy Spirit, it seems to us, is doing lovely things through the brothers of our Order all over the world. Such a discovery is most comforting.

Hence our fraternal message is now an insistent request that our brothers everywhere, helped by this Document, will continue in their commitment to making our life an evangelical witness. Therefore

it is necessary, amongst other things, to study in depth the Document itself by means of meetings, congresses, writings etc.

We end with the words of blessing and exhortation addressed by our Seraphic Father “To a General Chapter and to all the friars” (vv. 7-10, 12,61) (*Omnibus* pp.104 ff.): “Obey the voice of the Son of God. Keep his commandments wholeheartedly and practise his counsels perfectly. Give praise to him because he sent you all over the world so that by word and deed you might bear witness to his message. ‘God deals with you as with sons’ (Heb.12: 7). May you who do this be blessed by God and may God be ever with you. Amen”.

Rome, 2nd February 1987.

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Br. Flavio Roberto Carraro, General Minister

Br. Francisco Iglesias, General Vicar

Br. Claude Ollukaren, Second Definitor

Br. José Carlos Pedroso, Third Definitor

Br. Viktrizius Veith, Fourth Definitor

Br. Jacques Belanger, Fifth Definitor

Br. Pacificus Dydycz, Sixth Definitor

Br. John Corriveau, Seventh Definitor

Br. Teodosio Mannucci, Eighth Definitor

INTRODUCTION

This PCO V owes its primary inspiration to the General Chapter of 1982, which realised the necessity of examining thoroughly the topic of our apostolate.

The General Definitory, in ordering the wishes of the General Chapter to be carried out, wished to define the meaning of the project, and so, by choosing the title of “Our prophetic presence in the world: our apostolic life and activity”, it has reminded us of the unbreakable “unity” between life and activity, and of the fact that they must be understood in a “prophetic” sense, with sincere commitment of life and great openness to the future.

The whole Order was consulted for more than two years, and a Commission prepared for this PCO, processing the replies received and providing resources and suggestions for reflection.

With fraternal affection we wish to thank all the brothers of the Order for the wealth of their contributions to the work of the Plenary Council and to the drafting of this Document.

At the PCO itself, drawing on the information received from the Conferences and read at the start of their labours, the delegates immediately took note of the profound changes which are under way, in different degrees, in all the fraternities of the Order. These changes raise profound questions and challenges to which we must respond.

Who actually are we? What is the relationship between our life and activity and this world which is changing so rapidly? How can we meet the growing demands of the poor, the exploited, and the oppressed? These and other questions soon made us realise that our life can no longer remain on the tracks on which it runs at present; very often there is too great a difference between our way of life and this world of suffering.

At the same time it became very evident to us that pluriformity in the Order is a fact of life, not only in externals, but in our vision of life and of our place in the world.

For these reasons the PCO, which had set out with the idea of tackling the subject of the apostolate in the world today, saw the need to discuss the overall significance of our life as a whole. Thus the discussion of the apostolate embraced all the fundamental values of our charism.

This could look like a simple continuation of the traditional approach, insufficient in face of the changes now under way, but the internal dynamics and content of our reflections constantly sent us back to the demands a prophetic presence would make, both now and in the future. Following the “see, judge, act” method, we were led to rethink and reorder the fundamental values of our life, as well as offering new practical guidelines for their implementation.

We also realised that the term “prophetic”, which we had applied to our life, was in no way a flag to be flown, but an ideal to be lived, if we still wished to be “living stones” to build up the Kingdom of God.

From this, too, came the desire that the Document to be presented to the brothers should be eminently pastoral, without too many technical or juridical concerns.

At this point we realise that our future depends on our capacity for conversion and our ability to make our presence in the world truly “prophetic”.

The environment in which the PCO took place helped us greatly, both to realise the great contrasts of life (e.g. people almost dying of poverty, alongside enormous wealth), and to understand how precious certain values are when they are presented with simplicity and love. In fact, not only did we experience great hospitality, given with a smile and perfectly organised, but we also saw various brothers who are already sharing their lives with people who are very poor, keeping hope alive in them by praying with them and sharing in their struggles.

This document is also intended as a tool for the subsequent work of up-dating our life and apostolic activity so that they become a prophetic force in the world.

I. CONTEMPLATION IN OUR LIFE AND APOSTOLATE

The importance of contemplation

Our presence in the world and in the Church demands contemplation as its very foundation. This is a sort of journey to the interior by stages, a return to “the place of the heart”, which is “the place of God”, a glimpse of the Absolute, which illuminates the whole of reality.

Contemplation is an essentially personal experience flowing from the innermost depths of the human being as he or she faces the mystery of God. Hence all language is inadequate for the expression of its ineffable richness.

Facing our prophetic and apostolic vocation, we experience the imperative summons to this contemplative dimension, so characteristic of our Franciscan charism: to live on intimate terms with God, and, contemplating in humanity the image of the Son, we become apostles of Christ.

2. *The contribution of PCO V*

In 1973 at Taizé our Order held a PCO about prayer, and drafted a valuable chapter on the same subject in the Constitutions. PCO V intends, above all, to underline some aspects of contemplation which are essential for our life and activity.

A. New contexts of contemplation

3. *The contribution and dangers of the new contexts*

We see that in the world of today development in every sphere has brought many benefits to mankind: the raising of the level of culture, more profound interpersonal relationships, the increased effectiveness of our resources, easier communications, better living standards etc. These changes have helped to improve emotional growth, the development of the intuitive faculty, a more mature critical ability, and a more conscious openness to the truth. The communications media have enlarged the horizons of our knowledge by providing a more global vision of life.

However, we also see dangers in this development, such as more superficial interpersonal relationships, the lack of times of silence; failures in communication; self-sufficiency; the complete immersion of the person in material things and in consumerism; and - on a more structural level - the manipulation of the media by political and economic forces offering false values.

Yet at the same time we discover that human beings have a growing need for mystery and transcendence. The widespread sense of anguish and bewilderment begets a search for total abandonment to the mystery of God. From this follows an experience which is above all the fruit of intuition, and which drives one towards affective union with God, a union lived in interpersonal and community relationships.

Many seek other forms of encounter with God: the spiritual ideas and the prayer-forms of the East have come to the West.

4. *Positive and negative phenomena*

In the Church and the Order also we meet both negative and positive phenomena regarding contemplation.

Interior dissipation, which seeks compensation in activism, seriously compromises the experience of God in prayer and in hearing the Word on the one hand, and spiritual dialogue with one's confreres on the other.

As a consequence comes an inability "to be men of prayer", and still less experts who can initiate and accompany others in the way of prayer. Sometimes traditional methods are no longer regarded as suitable for the needs of people today.

It is a joy to witness the rise of many new forms which seek to respond to man's need for the Transcendent: oases and centres of spirituality, new forms of the eremitical life, the opening of the contemplative life to the laity.

Many brothers are rediscovering the experience of contemplation as a vital need, as a spiritual dimension which nourishes activity and fraternity. Centres of Franciscan spirituality seek to harmonise the contemplative aspect with the active. This could be the prelude to a new contemplative springtime in the Order.

B. The characteristics of our contemplation

5. *An inborn need*

Contemplation is an inborn need of human beings, which manifests itself in the varied and rich traditions of the great religions. Its characteristics are:

— a way of life involving intuition and experience of the mystery of God and a perception of the unity of Creator and creature;

- a global view and evaluation of reality which flows from experience of the presence of God in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28);
- a personal and community way governed by the laws of human and religious development;
- a spiritual journey with its sublime moments, but also with critical stages such as aridity, the pursuit of compensations, running away from reality, the search for extraordinary experiences etc.;
- a process which requires discipline, method and sound guidance;
- contemplation is an essential element of all religious experience.

6. Christian contemplation

In Christian contemplation, the following essential aspects have been highlighted:

- it is a gift of the Spirit, who prays in us with sighs too deep for words (Rom. 8: 26), waiting for the revealing of the Sons of God (Rom. 8: 19); who makes us cry “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). The same Spirit enlightens us so that we may recognise a ‘brother’ or a ‘sister’ in every person we meet;
- it has been described as a dialogue with the Holy Trinity who dwells within us; as worship of the Father in Spirit and Truth (Jn. 4:23);
- it is a way of entering into the personal and communal covenant offered by God to humanity for the fulfilment of his loving plan which is realised in the Incarnation of the Son, who came so that we might have life in all its fullness (cf. Jn. 10:10). Thus contemplation equips us to struggle for justice and to accept persecution;
- contemplation, as a covenant-union with God, expresses itself and nourishes itself by hearing the Word, celebrating the Eucharist, and loving the brethren;
- it is a gift of prophetic discernment whereby the contemplative is able to see the hand of God in history and to perceive its evolution from within in the light of the revealed Word, thereby becoming an agent of that history in accordance with God’s plan;
- it is a gradual experience of the truth which sets us free from illusions, above all from false ‘truths’ such as those uttered by political and economic forces, which seek to change us for their own ends.

7. Contemplation in Saint Francis

Saint Francis’ contemplation, which inspires our own, is characterised by the following qualities:

- Saint Francis discovers the love of God in the poor and crucified Christ of San Damiano, in the embrace of the leper, in Sacred Scripture and in the Eucharist. Thus the love of the poor and crucified Christ leads him on to the love of people, above all of the poor and suffering. Thus God is seen and contemplated within human realities; in them his transcendence is revealed.
- in contemplation Francis discovered the divine plan, and wished to share fully in Christ’s love for people, proclaiming the Good News of hope and peace through conversion. All his activity was nourished by sublime contemplation.
- Saint Francis lives the mystical life of divine praise in the context of his immersion in creation. For him the whole of creation sings the glory of God. This is the driving-force behind his message of a universal brotherhood amongst men and with all creation. Saint Francis meets God in contemplation by way of intuition and affection, a way taken up again by the Capuchin tradition, for which “to pray is to speak to God with the heart” (Const. 53:6). We are speaking of a way

accessible to all. The first literary output of the Capuchins was concerned almost exclusively with treatises on contemplative prayer, as a continuation of their popular evangelical preaching.

8. *Conditions for prophetic contemplation*

Our Capuchin-Franciscan contemplation will be prophetic and will correspond to the needs of the men of today on condition that:

- it follows sound Capuchin tradition, creatively enriched by new forms which are arising in various places;
- it is cultivated personally and in community, and is open to dialogue with the brothers and to the contribution of others, because these interpersonal relationships enrich one's own experience;
- it is based on an awareness of our radical poverty as human creatures. This awareness is the first step in our ascent to God: recognising our own wretchedness and need, we have recourse to the divine Teacher (cf. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 'Breviloquium' p.4, c. 4);
- it is humble and simple, capable of being practised by all, and capable of transforming the joys and sorrows of daily life into intimate union with God;
- it is affective and spontaneous, the expression of a heart opening out towards God, towards the brothers and towards every creature;
- it is capable of leading us to real poverty and to incorporation into the world of the poor,
- it is open to the poor and the crucified of our day, seeking to learn from them and to be in solidarity with them;
- it brings to the celebration of the Eucharist the problems of the day, as a sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus, keeping in mind the cultural roots of diverse peoples.

C. Practical options

9. *Practical means*

The brothers must be offered the practical means by which to foster the encounter with God in their inner life and in the realities which surround them. Therefore we must:

- implement on-going formation programmes in contemplation, at the same time utilising the findings of new and sound psychological research;
- train spiritual directors and guides;
- organise our personal and community life in such a way that its contemplative dimension is assisted not only at definite times, but as the fundamental commitment in our life;
- provide and safeguard an environment with time and space for silence.

10. *A contemplative way*

We need to rediscover valid traditional forms of the contemplative way, renewed by an awareness of the dimension of social solidarity (fasts, vigils, pilgrimages etc.).

11. *Houses of prayer*

We must foster houses of prayer and hermitages to nourish our contemplative life (Const. 56:1) and to help those who are seeking forms of contemplation adapted to various different conditions.

12. *Open fraternities*

We must cultivate a welcoming attitude in our communities, which should be open to all who want to come, individually or in groups, to share in the life of the brothers and to get to know Franciscan spirituality.

13. *Centres of contemplation*

Especially in the big cities, it is well to promote contemplative centres and places where people can meet on a human and religious level, perhaps in collaboration with other men and women religious.

14. To develop the contemplative life in the Order, it is useful to organise meetings at which brothers from different cultures can share their experiences and help each other to make progress on this difficult journey.

II. THE GIFT AND TASK OF FRATERNITY

15. *Universal brotherhood*

Within the world-wide search for greater community and the particular effort to witness to fraternity ourselves, three inter-related elements are always involved: the fundamental dignity of every person, manifested in freedom; their fundamental equality and the necessary solidarity among them.

In all these dimensions we recognise a gift of God which commits us to the task of creating one single family. Our fraternity is called to give witness to this universal trend and to facilitate its expression. This gift and task of ours was highlighted when the General Chapter of 1968 gave special importance to the theme of ‘Fraternity’ as a fundamental value in Chapter VI of our Constitutions.

A. Dignity, equality and solidarity in today’s world

16. *Human dignity is inviolable*

Human and social relationships are based upon the inviolable dignity of every person, actualised in freedom. All institutions, and the social order itself, must be based on this principle. As a consequence, persons must be valued above structures.

This notwithstanding, we find ourselves faced with divisions, manipulation and exploitation, all taking place under the banner of freedom. In this process civil, political and religious rights are often violated.

Elements of these tendencies can be found even in the Church and in the Order. Nevertheless, there exists a clear effort to create structures founded upon and productive of the primacy of the person. Since each person is an individual and each fraternity has its own singular character, the Order affirms and defends pluriformity as a value in itself.

17. *Equality*

On the basis of the inviolable dignity of men and woman created in the image of God (Gen. 1: 26-28), all persons are equal and must be treated as such. A sign of the endeavour to actualise this universal right is evidenced by the movements working for political and religious equality between races and between men and women.

In the Church, too, we notice an effort to include the marginalised and the laity in its life and activity. This universal phenomenon has also influenced our Order, which has clearly recognised the equality of all the brothers, based on our common vocation (Const. 84:4,5; 11 5:6).

Despite these movements towards equality, forms of discrimination can be found almost everywhere: sexism, racism, class-distinction and exclusion of the old ('ageism') undermine community', tribalism and the caste system still divide societies. Within nations, as in the sphere of international relations, the rich and the powerful flourish at the expense of the poor and the oppressed. Economic, social and cultural rights are often violated in the process. Since the Church and the Order are part of this world, they must continually beware of tendencies towards these forms of discrimination.

18. *World-wide solidarity*

The existence of institutions and movements of a regional and international character attests to a historical development towards global solidarity. The rapid development of technology and communications, progress in the field of electronics and computers, transportation and space research, all further the possibility of making the world one big village. Business people and politicians, cultural exchanges and sporting events, provide still further possibilities to promote bonds of solidarity. This phenomenon of solidarity is present also among the developing nations.

In spite of this, personal and communal selfishness continually threatens to nullify efforts aimed at establishing community. Ethnocentrism, nationalism and religious fanaticism are frequently found. Violence, terrorism and the arms race grow apace. The wealth of the northern hemisphere increases while the debts of the south pile up.

Much of the breakdown in solidarity must be attributed to a false notion of self-fulfilment and to individualism. Just as individualism is breaking up the unity of the family, so in our Order and in our fraternities it threatens to undermine our fundamental value of brotherhood. Despite the fact that we say fraternity is our chief apostolate, in reality it is the individual apostolic activities which condition our fraternity. Because of such forms of individualism, our bonds of fraternity are perhaps weaker than they were in the past.

Even though there will always be tension between the goals of a community and the development of the personality and gifts of each person, the present situation in the world, the Church and the Order demands an immediate response to individualism.

B. From individualism to the prophetic witness of fraternity

19. *Causes of individualism*

The causes of individualism cannot be isolated to the point where it is possible to indicate this or that cause, this or that person. Our individualism reflects that of society, East or West, North or South.

Notwithstanding the slogans about liberty and equality and commitment to solidarity, there are forces which develop subtle forms of collectivisation through political control of the media and through economic manipulation (dominance of the economically powerful through commercial advertising). These result in an increasing stress on individualism. Furthermore, bureaucratization takes place in a way that also increases individualism. All this has had its effects on our fraternities too. Although in some provinces there are examples which give rise to hope, all too often we find in the Order a kind of minimalism in what regards community prayer and the time spent around the common table. Then when the brothers do come together for recreation it is dominated by

television. The result is the erosion of the bonds of brotherhood among us, a tendency to give priority to communities outside the fraternity and, again, a growing individualism.

20. *Overcoming individualism*

As can be seen from Chapter VI of the Constitutions and from PCO I (Quito) and PCO IV (Rome), the Order has made great strides to ensure the dignity of each person. Rediscovering the charism of Saint Francis, it has reaffirmed his vision of a fraternity of equals based on a common vocation (Const. 83: 3). We will not be able to give to the world a genuine witness of fraternity and of solidarity unless we deal with our individualism.

21. *The basic criterion: a life of brotherhood*

The fundamental principle of fraternity is not only at the heart of our documents: it is the heart of our faith, as Jesus teaches us in his prayer to the Father: ‘I pray...for those also who through their words will believe in me. May they all be one. Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and so that the world may believe it was you who sent me’ (Jn. 17: 19-21).

Moreover the teaching of the Church constantly invites us to build ‘a civilisation of love’. The Council document on ‘The Church in the Modern World’ affirms that ‘God ...has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood’ (n. 24, Abbott). ‘As the first-born of many brethren and through the gift of the Spirit’, the Council continues, ‘Jesus founded ...a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love. “This solidarity must be constantly increased until that day on which it will be brought to perfection” (n. 32, Abbott).

Our Constitutions remind us that ‘inspired by God, Saint Francis initiated a way of gospel life which he called a fraternity’ (n. 83:5), founded on brothers who live together in charity. Faithful to our vocation, we must build up a genuine fraternal community, and so co-operate in the fostering of a family which is authentically human, in the Church and in the world.

Therefore we believe that the prophetic witness of lived fraternity is at the heart of our work of evangelisation. Above all it is a service of ‘Peace and Goodness’ as a sign of trust and of hope.

The realities of the world, the Church and the Order remind us of God’s plan; they urge us to be prophetically consistent with the gift and task of fraternity which characterises us as Franciscans.

22. **The example of Saint Francis**

To this end the prophetic influence of our presence and activity in the midst of the world and of the People of God must derive its inspiration from the example of Francis who ‘in love with God and with all people, and indeed with all creatures, is a brother and a friend of all’ (Const. 169:2).

C. Guidelines for action

23. *Fostering fraternal life*

Realising our need to move from theory to practice, we reiterate that all our *formation* must involve a process of growing awareness and constant conversion, both personal and communal, in order to promote a greater degree of brotherhood amongst ourselves and with others.

Specifically, we underline the following key moments of daily life in fraternity:

- a) *the prayer of the fraternity* (the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and other forms of prayer), lived in a creative and spontaneous way, genuinely participative, and realistic;
- b) *fraternal living*, expressed as true communion, which should find expression in trust and forgiveness, in understanding and esteem, in mutual love and availability, and in the sharing of all that we are and have, with special care for the brothers who are sick or in difficulty;
- c) *work* in all its forms, must always be an expression of the whole fraternity (Const. 76:2; 145:6); above all, it must find expression in mutual assistance, according to the gifts given to each, including the performance of daily household duties (cf. Const. n. 84:6).

To inspire our fraternal living we consider dialogue in all its forms as a fundamental tool, especially during meetings of the fraternity (local chapters). These should be frequent and well planned, including the use of group dynamics. As various ecclesiastical groups and movements do, let us also endeavour to examine our daily life in the light of Sacred Scripture.

24. *The gospel model*

In order that, enlightened by the gospel, we may be able to overcome divisions, alienation and individualism in our fraternities, we suggest that we adopt the method which Saint Matthew proposed to the Church in similar situations (Mt. 18: 1-20). This implies that we try to overcome existing divisions (18: 1-9), that we hold one another in mutual esteem on the basis of each one's dignity (18: 10-14), and that we practise fraternal correction aimed at conversion (18: 15-18). With these bonds of solidarity, fostered by esteem and correction, we will be more united and our prayer will be more efficacious (18:19-20).

25. *Revision of life*

We are confident that through the impact of this PCO we will manage to revitalise the prayer of our fraternities and the forms of our apostolate, and thus overcome our individualism. To facilitate this we propose the following points for a revision of our life:

- a) let us examine the ways in which individualism manifests itself in our fraternities, recognising its harmful effects and also admitting that, with the grace of God, it can be overcome.
- b) let us involve ourselves in joint enterprises which do most to develop solidarity among ourselves, especially in our way of responding to the cry of the poor (ET 18).

We particularly recommend:

- 1) that there be fraternities amongst the poor as foreseen by the PCO of Quito;
- 2) that those who are already involved with the poor should think about ways of deepening their solidarity with them, while those who are engaged in other apostolates should have frequent experience of living among the poor;
- 3) that those who are not so involved because of sickness or for other reasons should use their talents, their prayers and their sufferings for the benefit of the poor and for the promotion of justice, and that our prayer should express awareness of these needs;
- 4) that we reject any form of 'compromise with any kind of social injustice' in our life-style, whether communal or personal, in the goods that we use, and in our relations with the laity who work with us, 'awakening consciences to the drama of misery and to the demands for social justice made by the gospel and by the Church' (ET 18).

26. *Suitable structures*

We call attention especially to the matter of *structures*, which should be adapted to promote fraternity. In the first place let us take account of the circumstances of each brother when forming fraternities and assigning work (Const. 88: 2; 146: 4). We should develop our life through forms of government and organisation which foster mutual charitable obedience that is also active and responsible through subsidiarity and co-responsibility, and the growth in maturity of each brother and of the fraternities (Consts. nn. 23: 3ff.; 30:3; 37: 3ff.; 50:4; 142: 2ff; 157: 3ff.; 162; 164: 2ff.). Finally, let us take care that our houses are conducive to fraternal living (Consts. 68: 3).

27. *A lived solidarity*

We should strengthen co-responsibility and fraternal solidarity so that attitudes of isolation and provincialism may be overcome. For this purpose we should promote the different means of animation and collaboration in the fields of formation, the apostolate, culture, publications etc., at Order level and at continental, national and regional levels. Special attention should be given to animating the Conferences and cultivating a sense of fraternity by the sharing of goods and the promotion of fraternal goodwill between Provinces, and between fraternities of the same Province. Equally, bearing in mind our spirit of poverty and itinerancy, we must take care that long residence in the same place does not affect fraternity.

28. *Brothers of all*

To realise fully our vocation as brothers of all people and of all creatures, we suggest:

- a) that we open our fraternities to those who wish to share our life of prayer, community, reflection and work, when opportune (Consts. 68:2; 50:3; 57: if.);
- b) that we cultivate a welcoming attitude and a spirit of solidarity towards all, especially towards the needy, offering them hospitality and placing our buildings and our goods at their service;
- c) that we always give primacy to our message of fraternity and community spirit in all our meetings with and service of people, above all fostering esteem, understanding and fraternal dialogue with everyone (Consts. 97ff.);
- d) that, as a matter of preference, we lead our fraternal life close to the needy, the outcast and the oppressed, uniting our energies with those of voluntary associations and with all initiatives of partnership, unity and solidarity amongst nations (Consts. 12: 3; 99: 3);
- e) that we be sensitive to the needs of the local Churches in which we work, developing a climate of generous solidarity and availability of our personnel and of our houses;
- f) that we favour efforts at fraternal integration with the entire Franciscan family, and especially with the SF0, so that we may live and offer a message of fraternity amongst ourselves and with the world (Const. 11:3; 95; 152:2);
- g) that we cultivate a sense of universal brotherhood with the whole of creation, encouraging respect for nature and the religious awareness of what it means to be a creature (Consts. 11: 1ff.; 46: 7; 97:1).

III. OUR LIFE OF POVERTY AND MINORITY AMONG THE POOR

29. *Poverty as a prophetic sign*

Our vocation as Capuchins, living according to the life and rule of Saint Francis, implies that our existential condition should be that of poor men, and as such it is in itself a witness and a prophetic sign. Therefore let us concern ourselves by preference with the poor, the needy and the suffering in every state of life, in a spirit of sharing and participation, in the condition of minority proper to the Order. Here we can only underline some aspects of poverty, referring to the Constitutions and the preceding PCOs for other matters. The aspects which seem to us more relevant in the world of today relate essentially to our life-style and to our pastoral commitment.

A. An examination of the present situation

30. *The causes of want*

Many today are unable to satisfy their primary needs, material, cultural, social and spiritual. This phenomenon is the result of causes which are often outside the control of the human will, but also others which are certainly the fruit of the selfishness of individuals, of nations, and of political, military and economic blocks which create structures exercising oppression and permanent injustice. In this context the ‘little ones’, because they have neither wealth, knowledge, nor power, are very often condemned to silence and to be the victims of a history decided by others.

Many people lack other vital necessities, are dissatisfied because they lack education, social integration, or a sense of meaning in their lives, and they suffer by not feeling understood in their loneliness, their pain and their interior struggles.

31. *Divisions in the Church*

Like society, so also the Church is marked by the divisions between people, and between rich and poor churches. There are problems which have not yet been studied sufficiently, and have not had sufficient pastoral attention. We find in the Church also groups which have not yet an evident possibility of participating adequately and of making decisions, for example, the laity, and especially women.

32. *Consumer mentality*

A consumer mentality has a negative influence on our life and our activity. We have considerable means at our disposal (buildings, resources, tools). Sometimes the people we go out to are not by preference the poorest, the most needy, the most suffering, and we are at the service of institutions which often operate chiefly in favour of the wealthy classes.

33. *Solidarity with the poor*

However, we also come across positive aspects in society, in the Church, and in the Order. In society, through scientific research and the mass media, there is growing an increasing awareness of the problems, and new ways of solving them by joint efforts are sought on an international level.

In the Church there is a more lively sense of community, of participation and of service. For this reason awareness of the scandal of increasing distress is more vivid, and the struggle to overcome it is more positive. There is also at times a voluntary effort by the laity to improve structures and situations generally.

In the Order, greater awareness has had the effect of some brothers choosing to live among the poor, the needy and the suffering; it has also induced the Order to accept new ministries in poor districts and among minorities.

So it is that we are in the process of renewing our Order's tradition of sensitivity to the poor and the needy. The sense of solidarity has also grown through the exchange of personnel and of goods between provinces.

B. Characteristics of our poverty and minority

34. *Towards a more just society*

The fact that many human beings live in extreme poverty and in conditions of unjust dependence is contrary to the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person and of nations, and it obliges us to work for the construction of a just and united society.

35. *Christ, the hope of a new society*

The conviction has grown among people that the world is a complex system, in which each part is related to every other part, but that for this very reason it is an open system. Sacred Scripture teaches us that God created the world for all and that he has entrusted to human beings the task of building a just and fraternal society as a prophetic anticipation of the future world, in which all recognise themselves to be children of the same Father and servants of each other (Gal. 5: 13). By becoming incarnate and choosing the way of love, Jesus Christ placed himself within the human situation of poverty, as a man among men, making a choice that liberates them, not partially but totally. We see in him, dead upon the Cross, a poor man; one who loved more than all others, forgiving others; one who reconciled humanity (to God). Inspired by his resurrection, let us strengthen our hope in the building of a new society.

36. *Christ our model*

The contemplation of Jesus Christ, poor and crucified, a testimony of the Father's love for all people, enabled Francis to recognise, love and serve the poor and crucified Christ also in human beings, his members, especially in the poorest and most afflicted.

Love of Jesus crucified obliges us to become one with his suffering members, living with them in the give-and-take of attentive and active love. This we do by the austerity of our life and the sharing of our material and personal resources. Here we find the privileged way, following Saint Francis and our Capuchin tradition, which leads us to the poor and crucified Christ, the 'Suffering Servant'.

By vocation we are called, by truly choosing the last place, to find Jesus Christ in the atoning annihilation of his Incarnation (Kenosis) and of his Passion. This Franciscan choice will enable us to be close to all in a spirit of fraternity and joy.

C. Some practical suggestions

37. *The beatitude of poverty*

Convinced that evangelical poverty is a gift of God, a value and a beatitude, whilst we work so that people may have a life befitting children of God, let us, by our joyful life and by our preaching, offer the gospel value of poverty to rich and poor alike.

This poverty demands of us full availability to others as regards our talents, our time and our goods.

38. *Courageous revision of life*

In the light of the Constitutions (n. 60:6) and of PCO I (nn. 46ff.) we must first of all undertake a courageous review of our life, on the individual and fraternity levels, concerning the use of goods, the austerity and minority of our life, and the preferential direction of our activity.

39. *Concrete signs of poverty*

Our voluntary choice of radical poverty (Consts. n. 46) requires that we give up our unnecessary goods to help those in want.

As a practical measure, every provincial and local fraternity should decide upon a percentage of their income to be given to the poor, in a spirit of sharing and of solidarity.

Our poverty also demands that all share in the service and work of the fraternity, with the aim of avoiding, so far as possible, the employment of outside personnel.

40. *Presence among the poor*

In putting into practice the Constitutions (60: 6) we should effectively foster fraternities which give us a presence among the poor and the marginalised.

During initial formation, in keeping with our life-style, which should be close to the poor and the needy, we should facilitate a period of experience of their way of life. We should also make possible a time of specific preparation of some religious for work amongst them.

In our activity we should prefer the service of the poor, needy and ordinary people. We should stimulate sharing by the brothers and fraternities in voluntary organisations, and we should look favourably on full-time unpaid work amongst the most marginalised groups.

We should support those brothers who work without pay among those farthest from Jesus Christ.

IV. OUR APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY

41. *The foundations of evangelisation*

Preaching the gospel is a fundamental element in the life and activity of the Order. It originates in the love of God for people, a love which culminates in Jesus Christ, made man for our salvation. His whole life, from the first moment of his existence to his death and resurrection, is an integral part of his evangelising activity (cf. EN 6). Then Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to continue this work. Jesus Christ is an incomparable model of evangelisation for us.

We are part of the Church which, formed by the Spirit and enlightened by Christ, walks with all men and women. In all cultural transformations we seek to understand the significance and direction of history as it evolves towards a new humanity.

The preacher of the gospel lives the message before proclaiming it to others. Since we all live in different situations, we should present ourselves to others with a humble attitude, ready to listen and to accept, to evaluate and assimilate the positive elements of every culture.

Francis, a faithful follower of Christ, lived the gospel fully, was receptive to people's conditions, showed the world the love and mercy of God, and thus became the inspiration for our kind of evangelisation.

A. Evangelisation in a changing world

42. *Cultural changes*

During the last twenty years the world, the Church and the Order have undergone rapid and profound transformations. These enormous changes have had a profound influence on the Order.

Cultural changes have also altered the forms in which people express their experience of God and their religious values. People feel the need for the Transcendent. Until recently this need was expressed in institutional and traditional forms. What people express today through materialism, atheism, indifferentism, secularism, relativism and scepticism is a continual challenge to the Church and the Order to find new ways of expressing this need for the Transcendent.

Some traditional ministries of the Order have become much reduced in scope e.g. confessions, devotions, sermons, popular missions, the quest etc. In many provinces numerous friars are dispersed in a multitude of individual ministries, thus threatening to weaken the prophetic presence of the province as such.

43. *Changes in the Order*

The apostolate in the Church is in a process of rapid development, with profound consequences for the Order:

- a) the notable decrease in the number of diocesan priests has forced the Order to accept pastoral ministries without proper reference to its fundamental charism;
- b) the increase in the number of lay ministers, often professionally trained, has enriched our apostolate. However, in some places the brothers were not prepared for this and have been afraid to co-operate with the laity;
- c) in the Order, the increase in the number of brothers who do not wish to embrace the clerical state, nor to engage in the traditional ministries of the non-clerical brothers, has enriched and changed our apostolate. However, these brothers have not always found with us a way of conducting the apostolate which is stimulating and satisfying;
- d) some clerical brothers do not want to exercise the traditional forms of the apostolate of the Order;
- e) the role and responsibility of women in society have undergone a revolutionary change. Their increased involvement in the ministries of the Church has often been viewed with fear by the brothers.

44. *A new religious awareness*

As a result of cultural transformations, such as secularisation, a change has taken place in the religious awareness of people, together with an increased appreciation of human values. As a result:

- a) in many places popular religious devotions, so important in the past for the apostolate of the brothers, now make little appeal to the religious sentiment of people;
- b) evangelical religious sects of a fundamentalist nature address themselves to people's need for a personal experience of God. The strong sense of identity of these sects appeals to the need for interpersonal relationships. Generally speaking, they make more appeal to the religious sentiments of the people than do our traditional methods of apostolate;
- c) the ecumenical spirit of Vatican Council II has resulted in a new and positive dialogue with other Christian Churches, and a new appreciation of the other great religions of mankind. This has had a profound influence on the missionary approach of the Order.

45. A new demand for justice

Poverty and oppression have aroused a new demand for justice at all levels. The Church has declared that action on behalf of justice is an essential element of evangelical life and activity. The fact that we must preach the Good News to the poor for a more just social order calls into question past methods of formation and present mentalities. We note that:

- a) the Order has innumerable works of charity to assist those in need; schemes for the provision of food, shelter, clothing etc. Most of such works aim at helping in emergencies. However, often they do not meet the needs of those who are trapped in structures of poverty;
- b) the call to proclaim that justice is a constitutive element of the gospel is difficult to preach, especially to those who have power and wealth;
- c) in many parts of the world the brothers are forced to live and carry on their apostolate in situations of permanent crisis: war, oppressive regimes, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, famine, epidemics etc.

B. Judgement and evaluation

46. A “new look” for the Order

The traditional image of the Capuchin Order has changed considerably. In the Order such a change is not always taken into account in our life and work. Thus, not all attempts to adapt ourselves to the new realities have been successful. Nevertheless, in practically every area a new image of the Order is emerging. Some profound Christian and Franciscan values are fostering the emergence of this new look.

47. Revitalising the apostolate

The ministry of Jesus was an urgent proclamation of the Kingdom of God, a potent force which changed the lives of many, and brought them hope. “The time has come. The Kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News” (Mark 1:15). Many movements of renewal and reform in the Church have found their driving force in renewed faith in the word of God.

The revitalising of our apostolic presence in the world derives from the same profound need which made Francis exclaim: ‘This is what I want, this is what I am looking for, this is what I long for with my whole heart’ (I Celano n. 22). For us, the Gospel is not only a set of values to be lived and preached, it is the authentic form and content of our life and our apostolate.

48. Towards complete liberation

Let us accept the reality and the dynamism of the times as a sign of the presence of God, certain that the Holy Spirit will guide us and bring us to understand and interpret the ultimate significance of history. This is the point of departure for our proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let us take to ourselves the sufferings and aspirations of humanity which is seeking to grow towards complete liberation. Let us present to the Father the cry of the poor, and effectively share their lot (Consts. 46:3). Francis, in the *Regula non Bullata*, invites us to begin our proclamation of the Kingdom of God by living in peace amidst every culture and every nation. ‘Let them avoid disputes and be subject to every creature for the love of God’ (RnB XVI).

For this reason let us enter into dialogue respectfully, to discover the values common to every culture (goodness, truth, freedom, beauty) because they reveal the presence of God and are the basis of unity.

49. Building a universal brotherhood

As a brother among his brothers and sisters, every friar is called to share the gifts which God has given him to help others to live their Christian vocation and to build up a universal brotherhood, to ‘...strive, in the manner taught by the Gospel, to bring into peaceful and lasting harmony those who are divided by hatred, envy, conflict of ideas, or strife between classes, races and peoples’ (Consts. 99:2). The promotion of the dignity and rights of the poor is an integral part of our gospel mission. We express our vocation to minority more by sharing in the human journey in service to others than by ruling them from positions of prestige.

50. Faithful to the Church

Let us be faithful to the Church of Christ, which is engaged in building a new humanity in company with all people of good will. The pursuit of our Franciscan and Capuchin charism is an essential part of our fidelity to the Church. In accordance with the spirit of the Testament of Francis we should always be attentive to the needs of the local Church. Let us share its sufferings and its hopes in the development of new forms and structures.

51. Guiding values

Francis in the Testament describes his life of faith as a process of continual conversion. In the same way, the coming of the Kingdom of God demands the radical conversion of every brother and of every fraternity. This conversion requires a profound revaluation of the significance of our religious vocation and of the role of religious fraternities in the contemporary world. This calls for an examination of the criteria by which we judge, of our ideas, and of our values, in the light of the Gospel we are urged to open our eyes to the work of the Spirit in the world. It demands that we learn to listen. We must confess that sometimes we are more ready to preach to the world and to our brothers and sisters than to listen reverently to the Spirit who speaks in them. All this requires us to re-examine our projects and our personal priorities in the light of that ‘true and loving obedience’ which Francis describes in his Admonitions (cf. Admonition III).

C. A call to action and to practical choices

52. Pastoral plan

As a consequence of what has been said, we strongly recommend in a very special way that every province and circumscription of the Order formulate a pastoral plan, in which our new apostolic presence in the world is clearly expressed. We recommend that the formulation of this plan involve all the brothers and that it embrace all our ministries, whether of individuals or of communities. This new vision of our role in the world should give to each province and circumscription the courage to initiate new forms of activity and to abandon those apostolates and structures which no longer testify to a significant evangelical presence.

53. Criteria

The ministries of our Order (preaching, helping in parishes, chaplaincies, the sacrament of reconciliation etc.) should be revitalised in accordance with the following criteria:

- a) sensitivity to human values;
- b) the appropriate renewal demanded by the Church;
- c) in the light of the fundamental values of our life and activity, especially minority.

54. Ecclesial groups

Basic communities and movements in the Church present a powerful gospel challenge for our Order:

- a) they are part of the pastoral plan of many Churches;
- b) they are a new form of being Church;
- c) they are a powerful force for evangelisation;
- d) they foster the rise of new expressions of religious life based on the Scriptures, strong interpersonal relationships, and a commitment to the transformation of society.

55. Commitment to the poor

The cry of the poor must find an ever clearer response in the ministries and activities of the Order.

- a) all the brothers should be made aware of the rights and dignity of the poor;
- b) this work of raising awareness of justice is an integral part of all our ministries;
- c) since we are minors, the process of raising the Order's awareness of the poor includes a willingness on the part of the brothers to walk with them, sharing their life, their aspirations and their struggles;
- d) we reaffirm the validity of our manifold works for the poor and among the poor. We recommend that special attention be paid to the most recent forms of human suffering: the unemployed, migrant workers, refugees, victims of drugs and of AIDS, those living alone, the old etc.

56. Adequate spiritual animation

We underline the importance of responding to the religious needs of people by seeking to provide adequate spiritual animation. The transformation of religious attitudes demands of us:

- a) that our fraternities live a credible gospel life;
- b) that we allow people to share in our spiritual life;
- c) that we open our houses to different groups, such as youth groups, for their spiritual guidance and to foster vocations to the religious life;
- d) that we train spiritual guides capable of responding to people's thirst for God;
- e) that confessors, suitably up-dated in moral and pastoral theology and in psychology, be available to serve the people;
- I) that we set up houses of prayer, as the Constitutions (56:1) desire, and collaborate in establishing other centres of spirituality.

57. New missionary initiatives

The Order continues to promote its mission to the young Churches:

- a) we seek to discover the signs of God's presence in every culture;
- b) we are ready to collaborate in the creation of autonomous local Churches by training suitable ministers;
- c) we recommend that the Order agrees to initiate the Capuchin-Franciscan presence in places where it does not yet exist, especially in Africa and in eastern Asia;

d) we recommend an increase in the present missionary efforts of the Order. Also, suitable structures should be developed to widen inter-provincial collaboration in favour of new missionary initiatives;

e) our presence in countries which do not permit explicit proclamation of the Gospel retains its validity, for ‘the chief apostolate of the lesser brothers is this: to live the gospel life in the world in sincerity, simplicity and joy’ (Consts. 145: 2).

58. *The mass media*

The mass media and the means of communication are an important part of contemporary culture. We recommend that these means be used in a responsible way in order to create a new religious mentality. This requires:

- a) that the mass media and the instruments of communication be used as a means of preaching the Gospel;
- b) that the brothers learn to use such means critically, and teach people to do likewise;
- c) that lay people also be trained to carry the Christian message in this very important area of communications.

59. *Together with the SFO*

We should continue to regard spiritual assistance to the SFO as an obligatory and privileged family duty. Through the real complementarity of life that exists between us we strengthen our presence and apostolic activity and at the same time enrich ourselves with the gifts of so many brothers and sisters who live the same Franciscan charism in the specific vocation of the laity.

60. *Biblical apostolate*

In keeping with our Franciscan vocation and, as the Church wishes, in order to respond better to the challenge of evangelisation today, we should give due priority to the Biblical Apostolate.

61. *Pastoral care of the sick*

Pastoral care of the sick and the aged demands a renewed option and new training, including in-service training. Let us give pride of place to the work of visiting and helping the sick and the aged in their homes, to bring them spiritual and material help. We should also promote voluntary visiting of hospitals and of people in their homes by lay associations.

62. *Open to all needs*

In the different cultural areas of the Order there are many other activities which meet the needs of the people and of the Church: the promotion of culture, especially by books and publications, the apostolate of the family, youth apostolate etc. Our urgent desire to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires constant openness and sensitivity to every new possibility in society and in the Church.

V. OUR PROCLAMATION OF JUSTICE AND PEACE, AND OF RESPECT FOR NATURE

63. *God's plan*

Following Jesus in the footsteps of Francis, we have come to realise anew that, as brothers, our lives and actions must express in a prophetic way the values of justice, peace and respect for nature.

Harmony among these three realities was God's plan on the day of creation. It was destroyed by sin. Now as brothers we must collaborate to restore this original harmony and to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, with all our brothers and sisters throughout the world. This is the plan of the Covenant inaugurated by Jesus.

64. *The gift of peace and justice*

Peace was a gift entrusted to Francis and his followers by the Lord himself. We must proclaim it by our life and by our actions. It must be solidly founded on love and on truth, but it cannot be genuinely evangelical if it does not also include justice. As the Synod of Bishops said (1971): 'Action for justice and participation in the transformation of the world appear to us clearly as the constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel i.e. of the mission of the Church for the redemption of the human race and liberation from all forms of oppression'.

65. *The universe under threat*

Moreover, today the whole universe - water, air and 'Mother Earth' herself - are threatened by pollution, and by destruction on a huge scale.

The fact that John Paul II has declared Francis of Assisi the patron saint of friends of the environment (29th November 1979) invites us to extend to all creation Francis' way of loving in justice and in peace.

A. Analysis of the present situation

I - SIGNS OF DEATH AND OF LIFE IN THE WORLD

66. *New and complex problems*

The world in which we have to proclaim justice, peace and respect for nature is gravely wounded, but it is at the same time traversed by a new breath of life.

Many problems, above all in the realm of the economy and of ecology, are so new and complex that so far the experts have not been able to find adequate and satisfactory solutions. For example, there are as yet no 'models' for resolving the conflict between technology and unemployment.

The Christian Churches, too, have proposed significant research e.g. a plan for a new world economic system. Without knowledge of such research it is impossible to make a realistic judgement about the great problems of the day and about those responsible for these situations.

a. Signs of death

67. *The threat of destruction*

As in the time of Moses, so also today, one can hear the desperate cry of millions of women and of men unjustly deprived of their most fundamental rights. Human life and its environment are threatened with destruction. It is the first time since creation that man has held in his hands such great power over all the earth, either to destroy it or to make it much more habitable. The very future of our planet and of humanity is at stake.

68. *Militarisation and oppression*

Ever since the Second World War, humanity has found itself in a chronic state of war. Weapons of war are ever more numerous, sophisticated and dangerous. The staggering expenditure devoted to them unbalances the world economy and further plunges the nations into debt to such an extent as to impede help for poorer countries and hinder their normal development. While armaments increase one does not see an equivalent commitment to solving the problems of millions who are dying of famine, of countless peasants driven off their land, of the growing number of abandoned children, and of systematic genocide in various parts of the world.

69. *Forms of violence, obvious and concealed*

There are specific ways in which we experience violence. All around us there is physical violence against persons and property, sexual crimes, including rape and the ill-treatment of women and children. There are more hidden forms of institutionalised violence, as when multi-national companies put themselves beyond the effective control of governments in their world-wide search for profits and commercial domination; when racism continues in subtle forms; when religion is politicised or distorted by fanaticism (e.g. in some forms of Islam there is the 'Jihad', or 'holy war'; when work and livelihood are denied because of the colour of one's skin; or when politics and ideology justify their existence by apartheid. All this can become a way of life.

70. *Insensitivity*

Perhaps, given the mass media which continually bombard us with news of violence, we also have become hardened? It is said that, in order to survive, the victims of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki developed, in a few hours, an insensitivity to the cry of sorrow around them. With such cries of the poor in our midst, millions of abortions every year, the exploitation of women in so many nations, inhuman working conditions, worldwide denial of freedom of various kinds, systematic unemployment justified in the name of economic growth, the growing disparity between rich and poor within nations and between nations, terrorism and torture, one could ask whether we also have become hardened, whether we also have not developed ways of ignoring the death which surrounds us.

71. *Manipulation of the mass media*

The new technologies and the mass media, capable of opening this world of ours to unthought-of prospects - are they not all too often manipulated by those who hold power and who are not always interested in the promotion of gospel justice?

72. *An uncertain future*

Today there is often grave concern about the harm done to the balance of nature, which happens in the waters of rivers and seas because of the discharge of contaminated waste and of nuclear waste; in the atmosphere of industrial areas because of gases from factories and from heavy traffic; in the

vegetable and animal world because of harmful exploitation. Thousands of animal and vegetable species are disappearing or are threatened with extinction. Vast areas of the earth are eroded and the deserts advance. Humanity sees its future threatened.

b. Signs of life

73. *Defence of life*

Today we find many people who have become aware of these fatal conditions and are reacting to them.

Groups which give human and economic support to women who, at great cost, choose not to have an abortion; groups which, at great risk, speak out forcefully in their society, preaching a prophetic call to conversion; members of resistance groups which act in a non-violent way to promote social change; groups of people who supervise international agreements so that human freedoms are not violated by oppressive regimes; various peace movements which launch appeals and act with great integrity.

In addition to groups there are the well-known contemporary martyrs put to death because of their defence of human values, especially those of peace: Mahatma Gandhi, Anne Frank, Martin Luther King, Maximilian Kolbe, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero, Titus Brandsma etc. As well as these there are the millions of silent martyrs who, by their lives, their witness and their energies, took action to resist the forces which operate in favour of death rather than life.

74. *Defence of ecological balance*

New associations are coming into existence for the defence of the balance of nature, of natural parks, of animal species, of the seas and the rivers, for the protection of clean air in industrialised zones and places which have high traffic density. These are the new ‘crusaders for peace’ in defence of threatened nature.

II. THE CHURCH: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

75. *The Church's difficulties*

Today, on account of the complexity of modern life, it is not easy for the Church to give a well-articulated and realistic set of answers to those who seek a more just world, and who want to know the reason for so many things. The Church has difficulty in evaluating what is at stake, and the challenges to which we have to respond today. For her, as for everybody, there is a great temptation to give in to fatalism and to go with the crowd.

a. Shadows

76. *Danger of closing in on self*

Like every institution with a long history, the Church does not escape the risk of shutting herself up in her past, in her customs, in her achievements. Perhaps she does not ask herself with sufficient urgency the question which Paul VI put to the Synod in 1974: ‘What has today become of the energy born of the Good News, capable of profoundly moving the conscience of humanity?’ (EN n. 4).

77. *The split between doctrine and action*

Perhaps also we Christians feel more at ease with an ‘individualistic’ spirituality unconnected with the real life of individuals and groups of people, removed as we are from precisely those places

where injustice is perpetrated, or quite blind to the injustices which we ourselves commit? We feel more secure in the role of a director or teacher. Perhaps it is true that, as a Church, we are too little accustomed to face the tension of being exposed, of listening, and letting ourselves be taught, of showing our brothers their rights, and of accompanying them in their personal and collective development. Our preaching about justice has certainly become more incisive, but have we had the courage to go into action as a Church?

b. **Light**

78. *Defence of human rights*

In the Church there has been an effort, especially since the 19th century, to form a body of social teaching to encourage the faithful in their social duties. Vatican II and the thinking which followed it have given (the Church) a decisive orientation towards humanity. The Pope and the Bishops never tire of reminding us of these ideas. In many countries the Church openly defends human rights against oppressive regimes and resists abuses of the environment. Many times she is alone in doing so.

This clearer rediscovery of the love of Jesus for humanity has found an enthusiastic echo everywhere and we can say, has opened us up to the future again. The beatitudes of justice and peace seem to be a special gift of the Holy Spirit for our times, especially for the young.

III. OUR CAPUCHIN FRATERNITY: LIGHTS AND SHADOWS

a. **Shadows**

79. *'Psychological insensitivity'*

We Capuchins also have not escaped these limitations of the Church. Bro. Paschal Rywalski, then General Minister, said in his Report to the General Chapter of 1982 that we Capuchins were less advanced than the Roman Church in many matters concerning our presence in the world. We suffer from 'psychological insensitivity' in relation to the problems of the world, a fact proved also by various surveys made in the Order in recent years.

We have still to rectify clerical attitudes. Often we are inclined to support the upper classes which support us. At times our attitude towards the world reflects that of the mass media.

b. **Light**

80. *New paths for the future*

The recent renewal of our Order, so clearly evident in the revision of the Constitutions in 1968, and which has been continued by the PCOs and many local meetings, has opened up unthought-of paths for our future. Our level of awareness of what happens to humanity and of what are the concrete demands of Jesus' fraternal plan for us has been decisively intensified in recent years. One sign of this, amongst others, is the new way of regarding ourselves as 'persons' in our mutual relationships and in the practice of obedience.

We expect the Order to take the reality of the situation seriously into account. We hope that it will, as in its early days, get back to listening to its primitive vocation in order to make some decisive choices.

b. Criteria and motives for our choices

81. *Respect for human rights*

A prime criterion is respect for fundamental human rights. This implies putting man and his rights back at the centre of our concerns; reacting every time that a human being, or a people, is the object of injustice, or is impeded in its normal development, or is excluded from any kind of rightful participation (cf. Const. 99:1-2); and intervening every time nature is abused or attacked.

82. Fighting for the cause of humanity

Jesus spent himself for man's sake. He is 'the Just One' (Is. 45:8), 'our Peace' (Eph. 2: 14), passionate in his desire that all should have life to the full (Jn. 10: 10ff.), that no one should be excluded from this, and that those who have less chance of life should be given first consideration (Lk. 4: 1 6ff). This fraternal plan of Jesus- lived by us courageously, dangerously and if necessary even to the point of a violent death - is our Christian vocation. If this life-giving circle which leads to peace is impeded by injustice or any other evil, then we must fight so that life may continue to circulate abundantly for all.

83. The experience of Saint Francis

This is the experience lived by Francis in his following of Jesus. The vocation he received was to proclaim peace, i.e. life in abundance (Testament 23; I Cel 29). He did this with the joy of one who transmits life, but also in a spirit of penance and conversion, like Jesus, who shed his blood to fulfil his mission of peace (Eph. 2: 14). He first became a man of peace, and then he proclaimed peace.

84. Preference for the 'outcasts'

Like Jesus, Francis preached the gospel of peace to all, with a preference for the 'outcasts' from the beginning (Testament 1-3). He did this as a 'minor', taking the lowliest as his starting point; he did it without violence, without powerful resources, but resolutely, taking on the risks involved (his visit to the Sultan).

85. Universal brotherhood

Francis lived and preached peace to people, to animals, and to things, as to brothers and sisters, members of the same family, respectfully and gratuitously. He believed that every being could become a 'brother' - the Sultan, the wolf, fire. Thus he did justice to persons and to nature, seeing them as God sees them, and treating them as God treats them.

86. Our charism

Francis has passed on to us a special charism for peace, justice and nature. The point of view of the poor is the privileged place from which a son of Francis sees and proclaims values. Reconciliation and respect for creation are the means that Francis proposes to us for attaining true peace and harmony. This forms an integral part of our Franciscan vocation.

87. Our apostolate

What has been said can be lived in the greatest freedom and pluriformity. However, the substance of it cannot be rejected without calling into question our Franciscan charism. Paul VI reminded us

of this at our General Chapter in 1976: ‘I would like to recall one of the most traditional characteristics of the spirit of your Order, which it seems to us important to emphasise even today, especially in your apostolate, namely, to make yourselves in all circumstances bringers of peace amongst men.’

88. *Boldly and with courage*

Our Constitutions of 1982, in line with the CPOs of Quito (9,17), of Mattli (4,22,27) and of Rome (6,8,12,31,42,44), invite us to be bold and courageous. ‘We should not be afraid to proclaim to persons in positions of power and to rulers of peoples the message of conversion to justice and the duty of preserving peace’ (Consts. 145:4). Many of our brothers have already run the risk of doing this in the past. Those who try to do it today do not always receive a warm welcome.

89. *The example of Saint Francis*

It is a matter of rediscovering the hidden force of our charism. On the occasion of the eighth centenary of the birth of Francis the Italian Bishops wrote, ‘without trying to change the social structures of his time, Francis in fact revolutionised his time by renewing the conscience of people and the face of society’. (*Osservatore Romano*, 14th March 1982, p.4)

90. *Capuchin promoters of justice and peace*

Our active presence in the promotion of justice and peace draws inspiration also from the tradition of our Order. Indeed, the Capuchins, such as Giacomo da Casale, Marco d’Aviano, Saint Lawrence of Brindisi etc., right from the start, have promoted a great work of social pacification and justice, as much in humble ways and on the local level e.g. through their preaching, as in diplomatic missions on the grand scale, with people of eminence.

c. Specific lines of action

91. *On the way of Christ crucified*

The contemplation of Jesus and of his members can transform us. The oppressed and the outcast will be our brothers and sisters. They will also be our teachers. With Jesus and these, his suffering members, we will experience conversion to peace, not theoretically, but in a way that will spur us to definite and courageous actions. That will certainly set us on the way of the Cross, but it will also make us capable of loving all, even our enemies, as our Franciscan work for peace demands.

This contemplation of Jesus and of his members will doubtless make us realise that we must change many things in our personal and community life which are thought to be important. It will urge us to radically renew our choice of priorities, to ‘re-found’ our life, starting from a rediscovered ‘inspiration’.

92. *Living contact with the marginalised*

The outcasts of this world have privileged admission to the Kingdom of God and are the first to receive the Good News (Lk. 4: 14-18), for which reason it has become a duty for the Order to have fraternities amongst the poor, in order to hear their authentic voice. We are fortunate in having so

many of our brothers in daily contact with the oppressed and the marginalised. These will help us to hear the cry of the poor and to admit it into our prayers and into our resistance to everything which oppresses them. Therefore, let us follow the example of Francis, who willed to return frequently to the lepers in order to learn from them (Rnb IX, 3),

93. *The drama of wretched poverty*

Let us remember the words addressed to religious by Paul VI some twenty years ago: ‘How, then, will the cry of the poor find an echo in our life? In the first place it should debar you from anything which would be a compromise with any form of social injustice. It obliges you also to awaken consciences to the drama of wretched poverty and the demands of social justice, of the gospel and of the Church. It leads some of your members to join the poor in their state of life, and to share their bitter cares.’ (ET 18)

94. *A new way of learning*

We have much to do regarding the conversion of which we have spoken. It is a new education, which must affect the heart as well as the intellect. Francis spent a long time among the outcasts before clearly understanding his vocation. It is in public places and in contact with the outcasts that we also will understand the profound meaning of our vocation, experiencing for ourselves the injustices and the violence of which they are the daily victims. It is thus that Jesus advanced in wisdom, in contact with the outcasts and the despised of his time.

95. *Lived alternatives*

Our programme of initial formation should ensure that the new brothers have this experience. The same is true for ongoing formation. Do not let us neglect any opportunity of making other people also aware of this reality; from members of the fraternities of the SFO to the people we meet every day.

Let us remember at once that it is not sufficient for the sons of Francis to propose solutions and alternatives: we must personally ‘be’ and ‘live’ those alternatives and pray to the Lord to help us on this road.

A special word of thanks to our brothers and to the fraternities who daily share the life of the ‘least brethren’ at all levels; to those who are one with them in their sufferings and in their resistance, to those who day after day live out the fraternal plan of Jesus, each in his own way and in the most varied circumstances.

96. *Renunciation of violence*

An essential part of the conversion of Francis was his renunciation of violence. In this spirit, mindful of the value of the human person, we refuse to support the use of violence as a means of righting wrongs. In the same way we support the right of conscientious objection to military service, and we are likewise opposed to torture and the death penalty.

97. *International collaboration*

If we wish justice, peace and ecology to become specific services in our provinces and fraternities we must form an international secretariat with a full-time staff. Its responsibility will be to develop and co-ordinate this new ministry throughout the world, in a Franciscan manner. It will be at the

service of the General Definitory, which should constantly become the voice of the poor for the whole Order. It could also collaborate with other groups, religious and non-religious, which pursue the same end on an international scale.

The provinces are earnestly requested to create a secretariat for JPE (justice, peace and ecology) where there is not one already, and to give responsibility for it to capable people.

98. A *definite programme*

A definite programme to encourage and enable the brothers in the areas of justice, peace and ecology will have to be devised. Our option for these values should be based on scientific data in the fields in question. Therefore what is needed is sufficient information and trained experts in these fields, based on solid biblical foundations and on a critical reading of the life and writings of Francis. We invite our University professors e.g. at the Antonianum, Saint Bonaventure's, and other Franciscan centres, to prepare seminars and formation programmes about these subjects, and also to offer them as subjects for university studies.

99. *Review of life*

Every form of injustice and inequality should disappear from our fraternities, especially any forms of clericalism which may yet exist. We should also re-examine the salary paid to our employees. We should watch over how banks use the money we have deposited with them.

100. *Vigilance regarding ecology*

The brethren should also be vigilant in matters ecological, avoiding having gardens or woods which are used neither by us nor by others, or selling them at the risk of their being exploited. They shall be at one with those who fight against the destruction of nature in any form.

101. *Solidarity with all*

We are certainly not the leaders in the struggle to build a just world, nor are we alone in doing so, nor necessarily the best. Often the best thing we can do is to support groups already in existence, doing so in a Franciscan way.

We should first of all support initiatives originating within the Franciscan family.

102. *The greatness of our vocation*

We have not yet finished discovering the hidden power and greatness of our vocation. Like Francis, we have received the mission to live and preach peace and reconciliation. Through our vocation we bear witness that it is possible to live fraternal relationships in this world, based on justice and love. At the same time we are custodians of Nature which the Creator has entrusted to all.

CONCLUSION

We reached the end of our reflections on Saturday, 27th September 1986 which, like every Saturday, was dedicated to Mary, Queen of our Order. At the end of our meeting we can say, in the words of the Magnificat: 'My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.' We look

forward with confidence to the day when the whole of Capuchin life and activity becomes prophetic in the sense of the Magnificat and shares in the process by which the proud are confounded in their inmost thoughts; (when) the power of the great is re-ordered so that the humble and oppressed are exalted, (when) we invite the hearts of the wealthy to be converted, so that the hungry are assured of better things; (when) reconciliation and peace become moral attitudes.

A time of grace began in the Order three years ago, when we were invited to reflect on the theme of ‘our prophetic presence: our apostolic life and activity’. For us delegates the fact that PCO V was held in Brazil has been a potent experience of that grace. Now, it is calling on all the brothers of the Order to continue the journey they have begun, to welcome the reflections and suggestions of this document, and courageously put its recommendations into practice.

Trusting in the Lord who has assisted the Order in the past, we look to the future with hope. May God, who began this work, bring it to perfection until the day of Christ Jesus our Lord.