

## CIRCULAR LETTER 15

### Reflections on VI PCO: Part 2 of a Series

#### SOLIDARITY AND MUTUAL DEPENDENCE

*“Let each one confidently make known his need to another that the other might discover what is needed and minister to him”*

(ER IX, 10).

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. It is interesting to note that the text which Br. Francis used in the Rule to inspire *that sublime height of most exalted poverty* (see LR VI, 4) was written by St. Paul to inspire the first great act of solidarity between the churches: *“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich”* (2 Cor 8:9). The fact that Br. Francis turned to this text to inspire evangelical poverty in his brothers, indicates the intimate connection between evangelical poverty and solidarity. With eight of its 45 proposals devoted to solidarity and mutual dependence, the Sixth Plenary Council of the Order situates these virtues at the very heart of Franciscan evangelical poverty (see Proposals 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 44, and 45).

#### **A charter for the virtue of solidarity**

2. St. Paul is the most international of the apostles and in possession of the clearest vision of the universality of the gospel of Jesus. It is not coincidental, therefore, that he wrote the “charter for the virtue of solidarity.” Paul’s vision of solidarity in the Second Letter to the Corinthians flowed directly from his vision of church: *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit”* (1 Cor 12:12-13). Since the greatest gift of the Spirit to the church is the gift of love (see 1 Cor 13:13), Paul – as indicated above – turned to the total self-giving love of Christ, head of the church, to inspire the solidarity of the Corinthians. He appealed to the principle of distributive justice to determine the measure of solidarity: *“I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need”* (2 Cor 8:13-14). Such solidarity cannot be legislated, it exists only through the power and inspiration of love. Consequently, the solidarity of the Corinthians must be *“a voluntary gift and not ... an extortion”* (2 Cor 9:5). Because solidarity flows from the love of our Lord Jesus Christ who *“for your sakes became poor”* (2 Cor 8:9), it enriches not only the receiver but the giver as well: *“You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanks givings to God”* (2 Cor 9:11-12). Referring both to the gifts the Corinthians have received

as well as the gift of solidarity he is asking of them, Paul used the word *charis*. In his closing remarks, speaking of “thanksgiving,” Paul used the word *eucharistia* which is rooted in the same word, *charis*. In this way the apostle pointed out that there is an essential connection between eucharist and the sharing of gifts. In fact, Paul very bluntly asserted that the failure to share gifts offends communion and sins against eucharist (see 1 Cor 11:17-34) (William Henn, OFM Cap., *Pluriformity Applied to Poverty*, Analecta OFM Cap., vol. 114, no. 3, pp. 724-725).

### **The Franciscan vision of solidarity**

3.1 Rooted in the modern church’s social teachings on solidarity as found in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* and on St. Francis’ vision of mutual dependence (ER IX), Proposal 21 presents the Franciscan vision (see Circular Letter 13 par. 3.4.1 and 5.2):

The sharing of gifts among the various local churches is one of the essential dimensions of catholicity (LG 13). For St. Francis the sharing of gifts goes beyond legal obligation and enters the realm of mutual love: “... *for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh (see 1 Thes 2:7), how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the spirit?*” (LR VI, 8). *Sollicitudo rei socialis* defines the moral virtue of solidarity as a ‘firm and constant determination to be committed to the common good, that is, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all’ (SRS 38). St. Francis adds weight to this definition of solidarity by proclaiming a brotherhood in which there is no shame in being dependent upon one another (ER IX, 6-7). Indeed, Francis states clearly that dependence upon others is a consequence of being created and redeemed, and is therefore a right (ER IX, 8). Furthermore, interdependence requires the theological gift of love, which enriches giver and receiver alike (ER IX, 9).”

3.2 Commitment to sustainable economic growth in this world extends the vision of mutual dependence to embrace all of creation (see Proposals 26 and 28):

... the brothers should be committed to peace, justice and integrity of creation, using resources of Mother Earth sparingly, taking care of the least ones with a sense of fraternal responsibility (V PCO, 65), speaking out for those who have no voice and caring for future generations”

(Proposal 26).

### **Solidarity, mutual dependence and the global economy**

4.1 Globalization has produced many blessings for our world. The transformation of our Order from a brotherhood centered, in 1970, on Western Europe and North America to a truly worldwide brotherhood in 2000 would not have been humanly possible without the globalizing effects of modern communications and travel. The global economy provides large segments of the world’s population with greater security and well-being than at any other period of human history. At the same time, solidarity and mutual dependence are goals which are contrary to basic tenets of the global economy which control much of the life and thinking in our world. The primary goal of the global economy is the increase of wealth. According to its logic, wealth is created when it is concentrated in the hands of the few, not when it is shared with the many! This is a denial of solidarity.

Another basic goal of globalization is to maximize profits. Profit is increased as dependence is created. The more others depend upon goods and services, the higher the price that can be demanded! Dependence in the global economy is not something to be celebrated as the *"consequence of being human and redeemed, and ... a right"* (see ER IX, 8). In the global economy dependence is feared because it leaves people weak and exposed! In the global economy the discovery of the dependence of the other is not an invitation to service (see ER IX, 10), but rather an opportunity to exploit others for greater personal profit and advantage. As Proposal 28 states:

The market forces of the global economy give a different and tragic meaning to the words of Jesus: *'Those who have will get more, while those who lack will lose even the little they have'* (Mt 25: 29).

To the global economy it is incomprehensible to seek to be dependent upon another. Therefore, the motivation put forth in Proposal 28 is incomprehensible:

Bearing in mind the example of Francis ***who could not bear to see someone poorer than himself***, we should commit ourselves to listening to people, particularly those who are excluded from sharing the benefits of the global economy (Proposal 28).

4.2 The efficiency of the global economy is built upon the concentration of power and the triumph of competition. This applies primarily to economic relationships. However, it produces a mentality and attitudes which go far beyond the world of economics - one which affects all areas of human life and relationships. Consequently, the approach to life nourished by the global economy rarely produces unity and communion. Most often, global economic forces and the philosophies that direct them produce division and discord.

4.3 In direct contrast to the basic principles of the global economy, solidarity and mutual dependence consciously seek to create an interdependent world since such a vision is more in keeping with a scriptural view of life (see Genesis 1-3). This view is also closer to *"that sublime height of most exalted poverty"* described by Francis in Chapter Six of the Rule. His poverty, while rooted in concrete economic choices such as the non-use of money, the non-appropriation of goods and property, etc. (see Circular Letter 14, par. 4.1), resulted in a world-view embracing a total vision of life (see Circular Letter 14, par. 3.2).

As one expression of *"that sublime height of most exalted poverty,"* solidarity and mutual dependence involve economic relations en fleshing a spiritual vision which goes far beyond the realm of economics Proposal 22 states:

Solidarity is not primarily about giving things to others. It is, rather, mutual interdependence and brotherhood. ***The culture of solidarity [and mutual dependence] creates new ways of understanding and living relationships with others.*** By going among the lepers, Francis changed his way of relating to them.

## **Solidarity requires choices**

5.1 As with “*that sublime height of most exalted poverty,*” solidarity and mutual dependence must be rooted in clear and unequivocal economic choices. For these choices – which guide dozens of our daily decisions and judgments – form attitudes and en flesh a spirituality which has a profound influence on all other relationships of life:

[The brothers] will express such choices not only by animating and participating critically in movements of solidarity and ecology, but even more by living soberly, content with little, and not blindly enslaved by the consumer society (Proposal 26; see also Circular Letter 12, par. 4.4).

5.2 The use of the word “choices” in Proposal 26 is significant and prompts me to revisit the concept of solidarity in order to ground ourselves in reality. In *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Pope John Paul II reminds us that solidarity “is not a vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far” (n. 38). Solidarity is not some vague, ineffective stirring of pity that one might feel in front of a television set at the sight of earthquake victims or scenes of victims of human rights abuses. We may feel slightly guilty

or even angry – *but nothing happens!* **Solidarity** makes something happen because it **is about choices** that flow from “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good” – in the words of Pope John Paul II. The mind-set that gives rise to such determination is the knowledge that “we are all really responsible for all” (ibid). Choices need to be “arrived at” after careful consideration and investigation of the facts. The work of arriving at choices can be difficult in the case of individuals. For a community, it involves hardwork to arrive at serious, deliberate choices. It requires serious dialogue and the personal commitment of each individual brother. Do we have the energy to make this arduous journey together? Are we prepared to take the risks such a fraternal venture involves?

## **Choosing an interdependent world**

6.1 By their embracing evangelical poverty and the economic choices which en fleshed this spirituality, Francis and his early companions did not over turn or reform the emerging market economy of their day. But their choice did have a three-fold effect: (a) it affirmed and protected their identity as “lesser brothers;” (b) it separated them from the more obvious injustices and inequalities of the world in which they lived; and (c) it presented to the world a visible model of human relationships in contrast to the prevailing model of

their day. These remain also for us today the objectives of our choice for solidarity and mutual dependence.

6.2 In March of 1999, the general definitory issued a document entitled, *International Economic Solidarity*. This document attempted to reform economic relationship between the various circumscriptions of our Order based on the principle of solidarity and mutual dependence as described in Proposal 24 of VI PCO. The entire Order is invited to study and critique this document in preparation for next year’s general chapter. After suitable modification, it is hoped that the general chapter will adopt this vision on behalf of the entire Order.

6.3 The principles outlined in Proposal 24 can also be applied to relationship between fraternities of the same province or circumscription. Solidarity and mutual dependence in the same province or circumscription is of equal importance for our witness to communion as is solidarity and mutual dependence between provinces. It vital that local and provincial chapter begin to reflect on this aspect.

6.4 The proponent of the global economy maintain that the increase in wealth in the hands of the few will gradually “trickle down” and transform the lives of many. As was demonstrated in the presentation of Ms. Susan George to the Sixth Plenary Council, this claim is a myth. The vision of a world of interrelationships built on solidarity and mutual dependence offer a stronger basis for hope toward social change. For this reason the Plenary Council urged that “fraternal communion and interdependence should inspire and determine ... our interaction with the world, particularly the world of the poor” (Proposal 21). This offer rich material for reflection in every local provincial fraternity of our Order.

6.5 From our earliest history, the vitality of the international brotherhood of our Order has been predicted upon the sharing and movement of brothers between circumscriptions. This sharing takes multiple forms. The most obvious is the continuing missionary outreach of our Order. For example, at this time new presences are being established in Burkina Faso and Gabon. New mission has been considered in Botswana, Bolivia and Haiti. All of these obviously depend upon the sharing of brothers.

There are many example of the sharing of formation personnel: the three Indonesian provinces have sent formation personnel to Madagascar and Pakistan; Indian provinces assisting formation in East and West Africa.

At the beginning of this century, brothers of the Province of Holland helped to refound the Province of Warsaw after our Polish confreres went through a period of oppression and suppression. Today our Polish brothers are assisting in the resurrection of fraternities in Lithuania and Latvia. Seventeen brothers of Cracow have been integrated into the Provinces of Vienna. Many brothers come from various continents to serve their compatriots who have emigrated to Europe and America. These emigrants often find themselves at the lowest social status in their newly-adopted land. By reaching out to them, these Capuchin brothers are helping our European and American fraternities to insert themselves among the poorest people of their societies. The vitality and rejuvenation of our Order as a world brotherhood will continue to require the exchange of brothers between circumscriptions. The appropriation of the attitudes of solidarity and mutual dependence can conscientize the Order and create new structures of fraternal collaboration between continents and circumscriptions.

## **Loaves and Fish**

7.1 The multiplication of loaves and fish is a miracle of solidarity. In the Gospel of Mark, when the apostles complain of their inability to feed the crowds, Jesus says: “*How many loaves have you?*” (Mk 6:38). Jesus makes clear that God’s miracles do not replace human enterprise! The apostles first had to stretch their own capacities to the limit. John includes a significant detail missed by the other evangelists: “***There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish***” (Jn 6:9). I have always found it difficult to understand that in a crowd of 5,000 there should be so little food available. Perhaps John provides an

insight. Perhaps others in the crowd had their bits of bread and fish, but only one boy had the generosity to share his all! With that important piece of information, John adds another crucial element to the exponential power to the generous act of solidarity of one boy with five barley loaves and two fish. ***God's miracles begin where human generosity extends to its limits!*** Indeed, human generosity is a miracle of grace.

7.2 If, as I said earlier, Paul is the apostle in possession of a universal vision, then, John is the one who best proclaims the primacy of love. There is no solidarity without love. This is why the pope can say: "Solidarity is undoubtedly a Christian virtue ... It [is] possible to identify many points of contact between solidarity and charity, which is the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples" (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 40). I believe that it is the vocation of our Capuchin fraternities to proclaim and manifest the Christian "soul" in the experience of solidarity. We hear this eloquently expressed by Pope John Paul II in *Vita Consecrata*: "Consecrated persons, who become 'of one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32) through the love poured into their hearts by the Holy Spirit (see Rom 5:5), experiences an interior call to share everything in common: material goods and spiritual experiences, talents and inspirations, apostolic ideals and charitable services" (VC 42). The pope concludes by quoting the Rule of Saint Basil: "In community life, the power of the Holy Spirit at work in one individual passes at the same time to all. Here not only does each enjoy his own gift, but makes it abound by sharing it with others; and each one enjoys the fruits of the other's gift as if they were his own" (VC42). What the pope and Saint Basil say about the power of the Spirit shared by brothers within one fraternity can also be applied between fraternities. When one local fraternity embraces true solidarity in the sharing of spiritual and material gifts, "the power of the Holy Spirit at work in one individual (fraternity) passes at the same time to all" and our brotherhood throughout the world becomes a solidarity network powered by the Spirit of God. Christian tradition has always seen the miracle of the loaves and fish as an image of the eucharist. While St. Paul affirms that the failure to share gifts offends communion and sins against eucharist (see Cor 11:17-34), St. John teaches us that solidarity is a eucharistic act. It is my prayer that our fraternities will offer in solidarity the "loaves and fish" of their poverty which will once again release in the world the miracle of love. Each day as our fraternities throughout the world gather around the table of the Lord, Jesus rises from the table to wash the feet of his disciples, to respond to the needs of his people (see Jn 13). May he find fraternities willing to offer in solidarity the loaves and fish which will release his miracles anew in our world.

Br. John Corriveau,  
OFMCap. General Minister

*Feast of All Saints - November 1, 1999*

### **Questions for Personal Reflection**

Spend a period of personal prayer and meditation using one or more of these scriptural texts:

- “For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).
- “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12-13).
- “How many loaves have you?... There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish” (Mk 6:38 and Jn 6:9).

### **Questions for Fraternal Discussion**

1. For a community, arriving at serious choices involves hard work, requiring serious dialogue and the personal commitment of each individual brother.

- What kind of commitment is required of the local fraternity in order to appropriate and implement the Franciscan vision of solidarity (see paragraphs 3 and 6)?
- Do we value and live “mutual dependence”? How would the “culture of mutual dependence” change relationships within our fraternity?
- Can our fraternity agree now, at this meeting, on one step that must be taken to begin this journey?

2. How do we react to Paul’s blunt warning that “failure to share gifts offends communion and sins against eucharist” (see 1 Cor 11:17-34)?

3. What must we do to create a “fair balance between your present abundance and other people’s needs” (see 2 Cor 8:13-14)?

4. “Fraternal communion and interdependence should inspire and determine our structures of solidarity within the local, provincial and international fraternities” (Proposal 21).

- What “structures of solidarity” now exist at these levels?
- What changes are needed at all these levels?