

*“A MISSION FOR MONEY”  
AN INTERPRETATION OF THE PROHIBITION OF  
MONEY BY FRANCIS OF ASSISI SEEN AGAINST THE  
ECONOMIC-SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF HIS TIME.  
STIMULI FOR TODAY*

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***Dear Brothers and Sisters,***

I would like to address you in this way, whether or not all of those present are members of a religious community. “Brother” and “Sister” are the honorary titles given to the “citizens of the Kingdom of God” and Jesus himself said that there is only one Master, only one Father, and that “you are all my brothers” (Mt 23:8).

This vision also has to do with what I want to say to you today and with what in the last twelve years has determined the way in which we Capuchins try to behave with regard to money. The last Plenary Council of our Order spoke about the “redeemed relationships” which must be lived in our world. In our times money and the economy have become an expression and a cause of unredeemed relationships.

***Love, great love for persons***

1. When I began to write this I was in Porto Alegre, the city in the south of Brazil well known for the World Social Forum and its criticism of globalisation and neo-liberalism. One morning I visited “the rubbish men”, who recycle rubbish in projects organised by the Capuchins and thus earn at least 10 Reals every day (about 4 US\$); while in the afternoon I read on the internet about the publication of the most recent Forbes list of billionaires: “The rich have become even richer” – this was the substance of the news – “The number of billionaires in the world has risen by 102, to reach the record number of 793, above all as a result of

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the rise in the rate of shares they possess".<sup>1</sup>

2. As a Capuchin, and thus as a member of the First Order of Saint Francis, I am not really qualified to speak about economics or, more specifically about money. But all of you know the joke about the three things that not even the Holy Spirit knows: 1. What do the Jesuits really think? 2. How many women's congregations are there in the Catholic Church? 3. Where do the Franciscans get their money from?
3. From an autobiographical point of view, in my life as a Capuchin there has been a huge change in my position regarding money and the mission. In 1991 I went to the mountains of southern Mexico as a "missionary" to live among the native peoples. I had two years of pastoral experience in Germany. I met up with my Capuchin brothers, who had made the "option for the poor". The Bishop of Oaxaca at that time, Don Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño, in answer to the question of what was needed for our service among the Mixtecs, had answered: "Love, a great love for these people". Naturally we had money from Germany but our projects were very much focused on raising awareness. They were normally small projects, at the grass roots level. When we wrote home or went there on holiday, our message was always the same: "We do not want your money. What the people of the mountains of Mexico need is your justice".
4. I have been General Secretary for missionary animation for the Capuchins since 2003 and I have the fine title of "Promoter of Solidarity". In this capacity I have to raise over 6 million US dollars a year, to fund our missionary presence and formation in the Order. – Yes, today I say: "We need your money". However I do not want to speak about justice and money in parallel, that is, independently and separately.
5. For a Franciscan this constitutes a direct challenge, because it is well known that Francis of Assisi vehemently refused the use of money: "I firmly order all the brothers in no way to receive money directly or through any intermediary".<sup>2</sup>
6. During my visit to Brazil in March 2006, I had a meeting with some aspirants to the Capuchin Order. In the course of the conversation one of them, referring to Rome and the Vatican, asked me: "How can the Gospel be preached from golden pulpits?" In saying this he was not making a very deep analysis of the Church. However I believe that the question of money and mission, money and the preaching of the Gospel, represent a challenge for all of us. This is closely connected with the credibility of our message. It is not only the Franciscan family that is obliged to live poverty; all religious take this vow and even the Church with its clergy is called to a simple lifestyle (see CIC §282; §285,4: §286; John Paul II "Pastores dabo vobis", 175 ff.). The challenge consists

in the fact that we have millions at our disposal, even having some influence on the economy in some places. And it is interesting to note, with regard to this question, how we sometimes try to avoid it. For the present meeting too we did not initially want to choose the clear title “Mission and Money”, and spoke at first about “Finance for Mission”.

7. I remember a Jesuit Procurator for the missions. Referring to 1 Cor. 13, he said: “If I had everything (justice, commitment, etc.), but had no money, it would all be like a gong booming or a cymbal clashing”. And I am convinced that without money there can be no mission. But we must ensure that our money (or economics) has a mission.

***Wherever they are and wherever they meet the brothers should be at home with one another***

8. And now I would like to present the journey that we Capuchins, together with our Minister General John Corriveau, have taken in the last twelve years (from 1994 to 2006). For us this has been an important step towards the future. Although I am referring to Franciscan sources and to documents of the Capuchin Order, I think that we can find in them a stimulus for the two challenges that all of us face with regard to our mission:

- a) How do we finance our presences which are growing strongly outside Northern Europe and North America?
- b) What kind of presence do our sisters and brothers want, and what presence can they have in these places in the future?

9. On 2 February 1996 the Minister General, John Corriveau, published his circular letter no. 9.<sup>3</sup> Eighteen months had elapsed since the election of the new General Government. During this time the General Definitors (that is, General Councillors) had visited all the regions entrusted to them. During the same period the Minister General himself had met the brothers of 80 out of the 150 different circumscriptions of the Order. The Letter summarises the deliberations of the General Council and is a statement of a programme of government, in which important “problems and challenges”<sup>4</sup> are recalled, including among others the question of the “*communal and institutional* expression of our evangelical ideal of poverty”.<sup>5</sup>

10. The background to this question is the demographic development of the Order and the consequences of the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. In 1950, 91% of the autonomous circumscriptions of the Order were still concentrated in Western Europe and North America. In the 1970s there was a growth in vocations, especially in Asia-Oceania and in Latin America. At that time Africa had no part to play, while in Western

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Europe and in North America the first signs of a vocations crisis were appearing. In 1997, 30% of the brothers were living in Asia-Oceania, Africa and Latin America. If at that time we had considered the number of brothers in Eastern Europe separately, it would have been clearly seen that already before the end of the millennium 50% of Capuchin brothers belonged to regions of the Order outside of Western Europe and North America.<sup>6</sup>

11. "Past structures of financial solidarity were built upon concepts of juridical dependence. Provinces were financially responsible for custodies or missions entrusted to them. An increasingly large part of our international brotherhood is in need of financial assistance. At the same time, these circumscriptions no longer retain juridical or even traditional ties with regions of the Order which have the capacity to assist them. How can new structures of international solidarity be set up which do not create dependence, and at the same time do not require an unacceptable level of financial centralization within the Order? How can we bear international witness to the principle of the Rule: "*Wherever the brothers may be and wherever they meet, let them show that they are members of the same family*" (Rb VI,7:FF 91)?"<sup>7</sup>
12. In this same circular letter no. 9, the Minister General announced the convening of a Plenary Council of the Order<sup>8</sup> to be held in 1998 "to deal with the question of evangelical poverty, especially in its communal and institutional dimensions".<sup>9</sup>

### ***Poverty as a road to fraternity***

13. In his circular letter no. 13 "Living poverty in fraternity – A reflection on the Sixth Plenary Council of the Order", John Corriveau develops fundamental reflections in preparation for this international meeting of the Order. He shows above all how "dependence leads to (and does not take away) social harmony".<sup>10</sup> In a personal conversation he indicated this vision as the key experience which had opened his eyes to a new interpretation of Franciscan poverty. Renunciation of money and material goods does not mean insecurity. On the contrary, it increases security, because instead of basing ourselves on wealth and the relatively small number of rich people, we base ourselves on the great mass of the poor. Olivi, the great supporter of radical poverty in the Franciscans' struggle for poverty, said: "Nothing corrupts truth and fidelity to friendship so much as the love of wealth".<sup>11</sup> The Franciscan scholar, Kajetan Esser, OFM, certainly writes that poverty in the external life of the friars caused great insecurity. But he hastens to add: "Anyone as poor as this is completely abandoned to the goodness of God and of man".<sup>12</sup> "The *vivere sine proprio* then forms human relationships in a very special

way, that perhaps can only be achieved where the human person takes seriously the imitation of Christ, who said of himself: *Non veni ministrari sed ministrare* (Mt 20: 28). But once again it becomes clear that this *vivere sine proprio* as an essential element of *evangelical life* is the way of authentic fraternitas".<sup>13</sup> The summary at the end of his article says: "Poverty was the way to fraternity".<sup>14</sup> The "Legend of the Three Companions" tells how the Bishop of Assisi spoke insistently to Francis. To him the poverty of the friars seemed unnecessarily hard. But Francis replied: "My Lord, if we had goods, we would need weapons to protect them, for it is from property that questions and disputes arise, and thus in many ways both the love of God and the love of our neighbour is obstructed. For this reason we do not wish to possess any temporal goods in this world".<sup>15</sup>

14. The VI Plenary Council of the Capuchin Order (VI CPO), held in Assisi from September 7<sup>th</sup> to October 1<sup>st</sup> 1998, brought together 31 delegates from all five continents together with the General Government of the Order. The theme of the meeting was: "Living poverty in fraternity". Following the model of the Synods of Bishops, the participants did not draw up a final document, but put forward to the Order the so-called "Propositions", that were later approved by the General Government. The central declaration of the VI CPO lies perhaps in Prop. 6, which sees the Franciscan decision regarding poverty as more than an ascetic decision, rather as a conscious option opposed to specific social and religious conditions of the time.
15. "For Francis, greed and avarice disrupt relationships with God, just as ambition and competition damage the sense of brotherhood among people. In order to live the gospel ideal of love and brotherhood in its fullness, Francis and his first companions adopted a way of life that involved courageous choices of poverty for those times, such as the non-use of money, non-appropriation of goods, manual work as the ordinary means of support and help to others, and alms in case of real necessity" (VI CPO, 6).

### ***The option against a society which excludes***

16. The VI Plenary Council on "Poverty in Community" perhaps took away from us as Franciscans anxiety about money, but aroused in us anxiety about the abuse of money. This seems to me a revolutionary change with respect to the Franciscan concept of poverty, based on a new sociological interpretation of Francis' decision.
17. Francis himself saw the beginning of his conversion not in the option for poverty, but in the option for the poor or rather, in the option for the excluded. In his Testament he calls his meeting with the leper on the

outskirts of Assisi the beginning of his new life "in penance".<sup>16</sup> The German language allows us to have an inner vision of this event, because in German normally the sufferer from leprosy is called "Aussätziger" (that is to say "separate", or "excluded"). The definition is therefore based on the social consequences of the disease, and not on the medical diagnosis. Leprosy had as its consequence exclusion from society. The leper was, so to speak, placed outside of the gates and recalls the biblical story of poor Lazarus at the rich man's gate. He was one of the "living dead", for whom a requiem Mass was celebrated and whose inheritance was divided up while he was still alive. Therefore the beginning of the Franciscan movement for the son of the rich cloth merchant Bernardone consists in overcoming this "exclusion". Francis, and later on his friars, are opposed to the "exclusive" society of Assisi and of their time. They cross frontiers, going out to others, to the excluded and the disadvantaged and they form a new community, an alternative to the feudal and city structures of the Middle Ages, which is extended to fraternal relationships with all creatures. That this is something more than an idyll Zeffirelli style (as in the film "Brother Sun, Sister Moon") seems clear, if we just look at the social relationships existing in the Middle Ages.

18. Francis of Assisi's time was characterised by profound changes.<sup>17</sup> While feudal society was still flourishing in various parts of Europe, in fourteenth century Italy the first signs of a pre-industrial society were developing. The population tripled. About five per cent lived together in the city centres. Money began to be very important and interpersonal relationships became much more complex (for example, the gradual subdivision of work, less of a barter economy...). If at the turn of the millennium cities were an exception on the plains around the Po and along the coasts, towards the middle of the fourteenth century three million persons were living in the cities. Half of these were distributed among the approximately 75 cities having about 20,000 inhabitants, and the rest were scattered in some hundreds of "townships" which sometimes had no more than 3,000 inhabitants. The cities grew more rapidly than the overall population. Often 50% of the inhabitants consisted of peasants who had migrated to the towns. The city as marketplace marked the beginning of a market economy. In northern Italy, textile centres were established with a high level of production. This happened too in southern France and in the Netherlands. Textiles became the first successful European export, while at the same time the trade in exotic cloths grew. Pietro Bernardone, Francis's father, was a rich cloth merchant.

***Money makes the world go round***

19. Money became the vital hub of this new society. It was easy to handle,

it could be transported easily and made it possible for many persons to come together. Unlike natural products, it was durable and could be kept and stored without danger of deterioration. It could be exchanged without difficulty and thus encouraged the division of labour. Between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the first banks came into being. In the cities, it was possible, with payment, to obtain formation – and women. Prostitution was undoubtedly not invented by the Italian city of the Middle Ages, but the anonymity of the city and of money made it easier. “The monetary economy changed a person’s relationships with nature, with work, with time, with human society in general and also with the innermost human values and religious convictions”.<sup>18</sup>

20. Relationships were more and more determined by possession of money. In the city the person without money found himself excluded from the necessities of life and was reduced to begging. Famines, such as that of 1190, not only decimated the population, but also caused divisions among the survivors, because speculators grew shamelessly rich with their reserves of grain. A lack of sensitivity to other people’s needs was present in all social classes. One day in a sermon Peter of Poitiers (+ 1205) made the voice of the poor resound, begging his hearers to give them the food that they wasted at table. And those who were listening to him were ecclesiastics!<sup>19</sup> Lotario di Segni, who later became Pope with the name of Innocent III (+1216), describes a divided society in his work *De contemptu mundi* : the poor railed against God, for not distributing his goods fairly, and against their neighbours, who would not help them in their need. On the contrary, the rich were taken up with amassing more and more goods and fearing they would lose them. “The evident disproportion in the enjoyment of life led to powerful social tensions”.<sup>20</sup> Money was destroying relationships with God and with human beings.
21. Seen against this background, the four decisions of Francis of Assisi were not an ascetic choice. Not to have money, not to have property, manual labour and, as a last resort for survival, asking for alms, were concrete economic and social options for peoples’ relationships with one another and with God, which were – and still are – very much endangered by the idols of money and property.
22. We are living in a world in which, with a credit card, it is very simple to follow the Francis’ prohibition of “not touching money” in the literal sense, but in which at the same time it is impossible to avoid financial implications. We often say to a beggar that we haven’t got a cent in our pockets – and we may even believe it. But then we fail to notice that the community bursar pays the wages of our employees, pays the taxes of the house in which we live, fills the refrigerator with a regular supply of

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food, etc.

23. We Capuchins have wondered how we can remain faithful to the social option of Francis of Assisi, without simply and ingenuously copying the past. The image of the Capuchin ascetic is deeply anchored in the minds of the people of Europe. A long beard, a not very clean habit and wearing sandals are still for many friars the expression of the Franciscan ideal of poverty. The fact that these very friars occupy posts and carry out services where they deal with money and are responsible for it is often not much taken into account. Certain bursars, secretaries of missions or even missionaries sometimes have means at their disposal which are equivalent to those of a small (or even not so small) business.
24. At the same time there is another aspect, which I had the opportunity of seeing specifically in Africa. There the friars said to me repeatedly: "For us poverty is not a value. In our families we are poor. We don't need to enter the Order for this". In the light of this consideration, we can see that the solution has been understood exclusively as the accumulation of money, which would change the "poor" into the "rich". Often in our missionary work and in using money for the missions, we have followed precisely this principle. We have thus made possible a change of social status first of all for the members of our Congregations and the hierarchy of the Church, and then also for other Christians and sometimes also believers of other religions. Everyone knows the consequences and the problems, because only in very rare cases does this happen without giving rise to greed, struggles and jealousy. Especially during political crises and periods of civil war, violence is unleashed against so many structures, ecclesiastical institutes and residences of the religious who have been motivated in this way. Also the constant need for "new money" leads to a dangerous dependence. How can we then, according to the spirit of Francis, opt for redeemed relationships without ending up in a false asceticism and without struggling uncritically in the current economic system to improve the life of our people?

***A different attitude towards money***

25. In our dealings with money and our life in economic dependence, we Capuchins have developed what is called a "fraternal economy" as a new way of relating to the world and, at the same time, as a prophetic proclamation. It is much more than a simple system of accountability or a fraternal sharing of the resources of the house. Its five principles constitute a prophetic criticism of the current system that many of us have accepted as the only system possible, and they call us to build redeemed relationships with the money we use in a world of asymmetrical relations:



- a) **“Participation** ensures that all those concerned are involved in significant decisions that are made. It is an important value opposed to manipulation and the concealing of information.
  - b) **Justice** does not require that everyone has the same, but that everyone has the right to what is necessary for a life with dignity. It is a way of recognizing personal and cultural differences. It rejects valuing people according to their possessions.
  - c) **Transparency** guarantees honesty, accountability and ethics in transactions. It is a strong criticism of corruption, dishonesty and manipulation at various levels of society.
  - d) **Solidarity** criticizes and counteracts the profit motive that concentrates wealth in the hands of the few and acts as the motor of the “market economy.” Solidarity bases itself on the experience of St. Francis - that all we possess comes from God and that the only thing that is truly ours is our sin. (Reg NB, XVII: 7 and 17.)
  - e) **Austerity** is not only the personal choice of a simple lifestyle but also a communal choice opposed to all that destroys relationships with God and with our brothers and sisters. It is a fundamental fraternal value that preserves the other values of Franciscan life. It is a way of rejecting a system that functions by constantly creating desires in order to sell more. Without this self-limitation, solidarity becomes a reason for misuse and destructiveness.”<sup>21</sup>
26. With these criteria of a fraternal economy we can perhaps succeed in creating a new kind of “inclusive relationship” where we live and work. Jesus is disconcerted by the power struggle among his disciples: “This is not to happen among you; no; anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant” (Mk 10:43). Thus it cannot be a case of simply changing the faces in the existing system and of putting the poor beside the rich, so that they do to those on the other side the same things that were done to them. No, it is something new.

### *The poor are the riches of the poor*

27. If we do not consider austerity of life and asceticism as Francis’ primary choice, but rather as the consequence of his basic decision for “redeemed relationships”, then (at least as Capuchin Franciscans) we do not timidly lower our eyes when we use money. We want money to build bridges, not to raise walls, and we pay great attention to this. And so there is hope that we can learn that the antidote to poverty is not wealth: Wealth – which urges us to accumulate - is in fact the reason why many people are poor. A lifestyle like that of Western Europe or North America is not possible for everyone, because we here are exploiting nature and human

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beings to their limits. The true wealth of the poor is the poor themselves. If the poor, instead of working against one another, collaborate, then we have obtained a great deal. And if we bring the rich into relationship with the poor, and the poor into relationship with the poor and everyone together with God, then we are taking a step forward, a step which brings true life to human beings and nature.

28. "Emmanuel Levinas says: 'The material needs of a brother are my spiritual needs'.<sup>22</sup> This way of thinking does not mean that we win heaven by our works of charity. Rather it shows us that meeting with the poor purifies our intentions and guides us on the Gospel way. Austerity, together with other values of the fraternal economy, is the basis on which we can work for the globalisation of solidarity".<sup>23</sup> Then we will no longer measure our efficiency in each case only by the sums of money that we distribute, but by our attitude towards money and by the consequences of its use on relationships between people.

### *New decisions with regard to principles*

29. The problem of the financing of our presences and missions in Africa and Asia, as also in certain parts of Latin America and Eastern Europe, will only be solved in the future if we create **a balance of solidarity** within our own community. The structures of our Congregations should not merely mirror the division of the world into "first" and "third" worlds. We cannot either allow certain areas to be "over-funded" while others do not know how to fund their basic requirements. This requires major reductions on all sides, and austerity of life, which allows for the sharing of resources.
30. This also means **allowing different cultures to influence and give new form both to our lifestyle and to our way of working.**
- a) Why are our models and ways of being almost exclusively Western?
  - b) Is it not possible for our communities to accept African family values that may be put into practice in Africa more easily than the values we have today?
  - c) Can we not take on Latin American cooperative structures for our social projects?
  - d) Would it be possible to discover in Asian spirituality stimuli for our community organisation?
31. However I am also realistic and I see the need for hospitals and schools, even if here we need to be much more creative. Structures of this kind will be able to be carried on by our brothers and sisters who are natives of poor regions of the world only if we can **overcome "personal funding"**. Structures that depend on the individual ability of a Western missionary

to find funds are destined to come to an end. I know fellow friars who collect large amounts of euros for hospitals from schoolfriends, church and political groups where they are known. And I can imagine the native friar in ten years time knocking on the same doors with the same request. I fear that we all know the answer he will receive.

32. I am also of the opinion that – if there is still time for this – we should invest **funds to ensure certain basic necessities**, like formation and health. These should be limited to serving clearly defined purposes.

### *The future is based on community*

33. But without the conversion described above in our life and in our work nothing will change. It seems that even with all the money in the world we will not be able to create just and stable structures. Without an appropriate spirituality we will not be able to change things for the better. The future is built on community. It is relationships which weave a social network more than money does. Whereas an exclusive society wants to ensure wealth by excluding, an inclusive society creates “wealth” by attracting persons to itself. I hope that our sisters and our brothers in Africa, Asia and Latin America are aware of all this. They are not efficient only if they have money. They have much, much more to offer. And that is precisely what the people need from them. And we in Europe and North America will be fortunate if we can learn from them. Because sooner or later the Church in those areas too will have to – and will be able to – manage on very modest means.
34. Everything has its time and its hour. In the last 800 years, only Francis of Assisi was able to develop such a vision of society. And he did this with the concepts of his time, which in the movement towards poverty was characterised by the key concept: “naked, following the naked Jesus”. We needed the *Extraordinary Roman Synod of Bishops* of 1985, which declared *communio* to be the key idea of Vatican II. The ecclesiology of communion is being questioned: “What some propagate as the ideal image of communication, seems to others like a pious mantle, covering the structures of a distorted communication”.<sup>24</sup> However the ecclesiology of communion gives us the possibility of making present to ourselves the network, based on communication, of the *Communio* of the primitive Church as a community of communities. Only such a perspective makes it possible to give a new interpretation to the renunciation of money as proposed by Francis of Assisi.
35. “It is through community that the church seeks to heal the division and violence inherent in the competitive nature of capitalism. The Apostolic Exhortation, *Vita Consecrata*, states that “*the church is essentially a mystery of communion*” (n. 41) and “*fraternal life, understood as a life*

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*shared in love, [is an] eloquent sign of ecclesial communion"* (n. 42). The Exhortation continues to touch the wounds of our common humanity that cry out for healing: the wound of unredeemed solitude, the cry for forgiveness and love, the need for each person's secularized self to be affirmed by a love that is unconditional and faithful. And so, the Holy Father declared: "*If the church is to reveal her true face to today's world, she urgently needs such fraternal communities which by their very existence contribute to the new evangelization, inasmuch as they disclose in a concrete way the fruitfulness of the 'new commandment' (VC, 45).*"<sup>25</sup>

### ***Rediscovering the prophetic alternative***

36. David Flood, OFM, describes<sup>26</sup> how the Franciscans developed by moving away from the original intention of the Founder. Assisi could not bear the potential criticism. It tied the Friars Minor into the pastoral structures that were acceptable at the time. The movement became clericalised and the Franciscans in time became "professionals of poverty". "When, however, the Franciscans, while remaining theoretically poor, stopped living in inner tension with the structures sanctioned by God, the weak and the poor could certainly expect greater charity, but certainly no change in their own situation."<sup>27</sup>
37. The prophetic aspect of the Franciscan option was lost. Austerity of life became a spiritual act and not the (necessary) consequence of an active decision in favour of justice and solidarity.
38. It cannot be denied that, at the time of the "Conquista", of colonisation and imperialism individual missionaries were very often prophets. However in general the Church and also the different congregations in the "Missions" were included within the framework of the dominant structures.
39. European expansionist efforts were blessed and legitimised by the Church from the beginning. Already in 1455 Pope Nicholas V blessed the incursions of Portugal into the coasts of Africa with the Bull "Romanus Pontifex". This includes a monopoly in trade and the right to enslave "infidels". In 1493 Pope Alexander VI in five Bulls gives the Spanish crown free and absolute power over the new discoveries in America and hands on to it the right to the mission. Thus missionary work is completely in the hands of the State, and "Conquista" and evangelisation merge into a single project.
40. The Pope finally granted universal patronage over the Church in the new world to the Spanish Crown in 1508 with the Bull "Universalis Ecclesiae". Consequently the Crown, by appointing the bishops, obtained full influence over the Church and with this to a growing extent also over pastoral work.<sup>28</sup> At the same time it took on the costs of Christianisation. In 1572 Philip II complained that patronage cost him 100,000 gold ducats annually.<sup>29</sup>

But in this way the Church not only had financial security, but it also became one of the biggest landowners in Latin America within the existing system and disposed of ever growing wealth. With this the foundation was laid for a twofold alienation from its original commitment:

- a) Pastoral work became an instrument of the State and completely failed as a means of criticism.
  - b) The clergy, because of its wealth and privileges, developed interests opposed to those of the ordinary population, especially the Indians and those of mixed race.
41. In the Africa of nineteenth century colonialism there was no lack of Christian missionaries who defended the local population. On this subject Wolfgang Reinhard notes: “But then they rarely doubted the justification of colonial dominion on the basis of the cultural superiority of the whites. Christianity was not at that time proclaimed as compatible with all cultures (...), but affirmation of European culture took place together with Christianisation. Mission and imperialism go hand in hand, since the nineteenth century is not only the high point of European expansion, but also the great century of mission, which is now, unlike in the past, sustained by mass religious movements, in a very similar way to how imperialism is sustained by mass political movements”.<sup>30</sup>
  42. After the decadence at the root of the French Revolution, we not only experienced the foundation of many missionary institutes, with a new missionary thrust. Funding also changed, at least in part, with the founding of missionary works by lay persons (for example Lyons, Aachen) or, as in Bavaria, through King Ludwig.<sup>31</sup> Mission truly becomes a popular movement. But the independence of the reigning houses that accompany it does not lead to independence in action.
  43. Br. John Corriveau presented an analysis of the development of the Capuchins in the second half of the twentieth century. We have already recalled that the statistics in 1950 show an Order still present mainly in Western Europe. The ideal of poverty was geared to the situation of poor wage-earners. Friars lived on their own manual work (gardening) and on the spontaneous offerings of the faithful (asking for alms and collections in church). The friars depended on the poor, which led to mutual solidarity.
  44. The relative uniformity of cultural areas and a stable reference point for the definition of poverty permitted a very homogeneous lifestyle. The Constitutions of 1925 established down to the smallest details the size of the windows and of the cells, fixed the weight of the bells of the church and the material of the candlesticks (cf. Constitutions 1925: 102, 104, 106,...).
  45. The missions were completely integrated into the Provinces. This allowed

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the missionaries to share in the modest resources.

46. In the years following the Second World War a great development of economic wellbeing occurred. Western Europe especially benefited from this, so that the gap between the rich North and the poor South became wider and wider. In Western Europe, for the first time in history, large groups of the population were able to benefit from social insurance by the State. Health, education and old age pensions became a common good. Above all the "poor wage-earners" and with them also the Capuchins benefited from this development. For the first time the Constitutions of 1968 speak of stable revenues, such as salaries and pensions, and even of investments. Consequently the normal collections of the friars disappear, the dependence on the poor was lost and with it mutual solidarity. We no longer share the destiny of the poor and do not even help any longer from a position of equality. Those who are excluded from wellbeing become the object of assistance and helping them becomes part of pastoral work. The Order, especially with the help of those who were originally poor workers, becomes a benefactor of those who have failed in social development. Worthy of note is the increase in aid for the people of the south of the world, which is strongly promoted by the friars.
47. Up to the 1990's wellbeing, especially in the northern hemisphere, has continued to grow. During this same time our Order developed rapidly in Asia and Oceania, in Latin America and in Africa. The Minister General of the Capuchins observed self-critically: "The buildings that have accompanied this development have often led to a growing distance from the poor".<sup>32</sup>
48. The social achievements of the missionaries are immense. In many countries the education and health systems began with them (as in fact they did in Europe). Very often religious sisters are in the front line in helping persons in great poverty and profound human need. We say with pride that with our works of assistance we have built bridges between North and South, relationships between poor and rich. But what is the situation of the poor with regard to the poor?

***Waiting for Christ's salvation***

49. It is not enough that our money builds hospitals and schools or monasteries for it to have meaning. Often this actually creates dependence on foreigners and alienation from one's own people. Our missionary stations are often like something from another world and our missionary sisters and brothers are afraid of the financial responsibility that will be laid on them in the future.

The main problem is not the fact that we do **not** have money. It is the fact

that – still – we have too much.

We do not need money for our mission. We need a mission for our money.

When we use money in such a way that it does not destroy our relationship with God and with human beings, then we await salvation from Jesus Christ and not from our works. Then we give **ourselves** and not goods. Then we feel that what we have does not belong to us alone, but to everyone. Then we live responsibly: towards humankind and towards nature.

Do not hold back anxiously anything for yourselves

50. I am a dreamer and at the same time a realist. We are not going to change the world, but we can change ourselves. And this is precisely what, in the multiplication of the loaves in St. John's Gospel (6, 1-13) constituted the starting point. It would seem that there was not enough bread. The question is: "Where can we buy some bread for all these people to eat?" This is our problem too. "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough to give them a small piece each". 200 denarii: this is a good deal of money, because we know that one denarius was a day's wage. The adults' calculating way of thinking was countered by the spontaneous gesture of a young boy. He offers the little he has: five loaves and two fishes. He does not anxiously hold back anything for himself. With his gift he holds out his hand to his sisters and brothers. And with God's blessing the miracle occurs: the others too no longer anxiously hide what they have. If everyone pulls out their provisions, then I too can do the same. And everyone eats until they are satisfied, but no more. Thus all have eaten their fill, but no more, and still twelve basketfuls are left. A prophetic sign!
51. Let us be inspired by the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves. Let us build communion in a world of inequality. Let us, like Francis, give money a mission. And we will have the money we need for carrying out our task.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/0,1518,405209,00.html> (10.03.2006)

<sup>2</sup> Rb IV, 1:FF 87; see also Rnb VIII, 3:FF 28.

<sup>3</sup> AOFMCap 112 (1996) 14-21.

<sup>4</sup> Circ. letter no. 9, 1.1.

<sup>5</sup> Circ. letter no. 9, 4.1.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Circ. letter no. 13, especially 6.1-8.1.

<sup>7</sup> Circ. Letter no. 9, 4.3.

<sup>8</sup> "It is up to the Plenary Council: to foster communication between the general definitory and the Conferences and between the Conferences themselves; to set up a

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reflection centre and examine the most important problems with a view to proposing their solution to the Order, offering aid with a constructive collaboration to the Minister General and to the definitors to bring about an adequate renewal of the Order; to take care of the increase of the Order and of formation of the brothers". (Constitutions of the Friars Minor Capuchin, no. 123,5). Thesis conveyed by the Minister General (ibid. no. 123,7).

- <sup>9</sup> Circ. letter no. 9, 4.7.
- <sup>10</sup> David B. Couturier OFM Cap. Formation for the fraternal economy in the Capuchin-Franciscan Order: A Psychological Analysis, Dissertation. Printed as a manuscript 2005, 30. Among other things, Couturier offers a splendid view of the development of the idea of a "fraternal economy".
- <sup>11</sup> Quoted in: David Burr, Poverty as a constituent element in Olivi's thought, in David Floor (publ.), Poverty in the Middle Ages, Franziskanische Forschungen 27, Werl 1975, 73.
- <sup>12</sup> Kajetan Esser, Die Armutsauffassung des hl. Franziskus, in David Floor (publ.), Poverty in the Middle Ages, Franziskanische Forschungen 27, Werl 1975, 62.
- <sup>13</sup> Ib. p. 67.
- <sup>14</sup> Ib. p. 70.
- <sup>15</sup> 3Comp IX, 35:FF 1438.
- <sup>16</sup> "The Lord granted to me, brother Francis, to begin thus to do penance, since, I myself being in sin, it seemed to me too bitter to see the lepers; and the Lord himself led me among them and used mercy with them. And going away from them, what had seemed so bitter to me was changed to sweetness of soul and of body. And thereafter, I stayed on a little and went out of the world." (Test 1-4:FF 110).
- <sup>17</sup> For the following considerations I refer essentially to Lester K. Little, Evangelical poverty, the new money, economy and violence, in: David Flood (publ.), Poverty in the Middle Ages, Franziskanische Forschungen 27, Werl 1975, 11-26.
- <sup>18</sup> Ib. P. 15.
- <sup>19</sup> David Flood, Evangelical poverty and the poor, in: Concilium 22 (1986) 88.
- <sup>20</sup> Ib. p. 87.
- <sup>21</sup> This text is taken from the "Letter from Porto Alegre" ([http://www.ofmcap.org/it/doc/porto\\_alegre\\_bn-it.indd.pdf](http://www.ofmcap.org/it/doc/porto_alegre_bn-it.indd.pdf)), the message of the delegates to the International Meeting of the Order of Capuchins entitled "Fraternity – economic justice – elimination of poverty", which took place from 13 to 18 March 2006 at Porto Alegre, in Brazil. The basic ideas had been developed by John Corriveau in various of his circular letters.
- <sup>22</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 99.
- <sup>23</sup> See "Letter from Porto Alegre".
- <sup>24</sup> *Communio – Ideal oder Zerrbild von Kommunikation?* Quaestiones Disputatae 176, pub. by Bernd Jochen Hilberath, Freiburg, Basle, Vienna 1999, p.10.
- <sup>25</sup> John Carriveau, circular letter no. 13, 5.1.
- <sup>26</sup> David Flood, Evangelical poverty and the poor, in: Concilium 22 (1986) 87-96.
- <sup>27</sup> Ib. p. 96.
- <sup>28</sup> Ecclesiastical decisions had in general to be submitted for examination to the Council of the Indies, See ibid. p. 97.
- <sup>29</sup> See ibid. p. 93.
- <sup>30</sup> See Wolfgang Reinhard, *Kleine Geschichte des Kolonialismus*, Tuttingart 1996, p. 277
- <sup>31</sup> While in 1832 the physician Heinrich Hahn founded at Aquisgrana the "Franziskus-Xaverius-Verein", King Ludwig I in 1838 founded in Bavaria the "Ludwig Missionsverein".
- <sup>32</sup> John Corriveau, circular letter no. 13. 8.4.2. The whole section concerning the interpretation of poverty of the Capuchins in relation to social developments in Europe following the Second World War is a synthesis of the fourth part of this circular letter no. 13.