

# BROTHERS AND MINORS IN OUR TIME

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Lineamenta in preparation for the General Chapter 2015

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# **BROTHERS AND MINORS IN OUR TIME**

*“let everyone in general be called friars minor”  
(Rnb 6,3)*

*Lineamenta*  
**in preparation for the General Chapter 2015**

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# PRESENTATION

The next General Chapter 2015 will have a different dynamic. In the past, the very ample report of the Minister General constituted also the material on which the Capitulars had to work. In the next Chapter, at the direction of the Plenary Council<sup>1</sup> - it will instead have one part that is the report of the Minister General, with all the expected information, and then an *Instrumentum laboris* that will help the Capitulars to identify orientations for the future and to elaborate choices, orientations and decisions to accompany the proposed path.

In order to arrive at an *Instrumentum laboris* that would be also the fruit of reflection and proposals of all the entities of the Order and of individual friars, we present the first material that we call “Lineamenta”. The General Definitory decided on the fundamental theme of *Fratres et minores in nostra aetate*, and it is its intention to involve all the entities and the largest number possible of brothers in the reflection process and in presenting concrete proposals so that there can be a raising of awareness and an animation on all levels of the Order. This “Lineamenta” is the result of reflection done by the General Definitory, of the contributions of some offices of the General Curia and the input of the Presidents of the Conferences.

Now, we offer it to everyone and ask that you study it, to update it and above all to send in your contributions on the third point of each part, “choices and concrete proposals”, because there is an urgent need to overcome every obstacle that hinders the transformation of *ideas* into action, to pass continually from *ratio* to *operatio* (concrete actuation). All your valued contributions are welcome and will help in formulating the *Instrumentum Laboris*. The proposals will be summarized and organized according to the categories provided by the General Definitory.

In order to arrive at this indispensable path, and in the end to be coherent and “prophetic signs”, we need to identify the means, the strategies and some concrete ways that we consider useful and effective to live our charism in our time.

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<sup>1</sup> CPO, *New Wine in New Wineskins, Proposals*, 22 (Rome 2014)



# INTRODUCTION

## 1. OUR NAME AS A PROGRAM OF LIFE: FRATERS MINORES

From the arrival of the first companions, St. Francis chose this name, probably when the Proto- Regula was presented to and approved orally by the Pope Innocent III. (cf. *LP* 67). In 1216 James of Vitry called the followers of the Poverello of Assisi “friars Minor”, and in the first written Rule (1221), this name is used: “let everyone in general be called friars Minor (*Rnb* 6,3). The title “friars minor” has its origin in the gospel, even though we cannot exclude the influence of the classes ‘majores and minors’ of the Assisian society of his time. When he stood naked before Peter Bernadone and the Bishop, he discovered the unique fatherhood of God (Cf. 2 Cel. 12), and then the ‘Lord gave him brothers’ (Test. 14); the fraternity was a gift from God.

According to the first biography, the brothers were called “minors” because they were “subject to all” and because “they always sought the position of contempt, performing duties which they foresaw would be an occasion of some affront. In this way they might merit to be grounded on a solid rock of humility and to have the well-designed spiritual structure of all the virtues arise in them.” (1 *Cel* 38).

They were “fratres-brothers” because in them was “a great flame of charity”, for “When they gathered somewhere or met each other on the road (which frequently happened), in that place a shoot of spiritual love sprang up, scattering over all love the seed of delight”; and “they loved themselves selfishly”; and “they gathered together out of desire and delighted to stay together” (1*Cel* 38-39).

A few months before leaving this earth, St Francis gave to Br. Benedict of Piratro the following exhortation: “in sign and memory of my benediction and my testament, always love each other, and always love and serve our Lady Holy Poverty, and always be faithful and subject to prelates and all clerics of Holy Mother Church” (*Testament of Siena*).

The name of “friars minor” is not a simply an empty title or stereotype, but above all, it is a program of life that carries with it an important permanent obligation, a profound dynamism that make possible the re-

alization and living of such an evangelical ideal, such an “utopia”.<sup>2</sup> To be truly brothers and minors is the heart of our charism!

## 2. THE PERIPHERIES OF OUR TIME AS A HERMENEUTICAL KEY

*“One only understands reality by looking to the periphery”<sup>3</sup>*

We wish to be brothers and minors in our time. We wish to continue to renew our vocation and mission as friars minors in a way that radiates a style of life that is significant, prophetic, evangelical in our world. We believe to be pedagogically important and urgently to overcome being self-referential and to allow ourselves to be challenged, to provoke our times. We believe that identity is built and enriched by dialogue with persons different than ourselves, in actually listening to the world, in reading and interpreting the signs of the times, and of a new sensibility to contemporary culture.

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (=EG) of November 24, 2013, challenges us to go out of ourselves and to welcome the concrete reality: “the Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction” (EG 88).

According to the Holy Father, “the great changes of history are realized when reality is looked at not from the center, but from the periphery. It is a question of hermeneutics: one understands the reality only if one looks from the periphery, and not if our gaze is placed in a center equidistant from all. To really understand the reality, we must remove ourselves from the central position of calm and tranquility and direct ourselves towards the periphery. To be in the periphery helps us to see and understand better, to do a more correct analysis of reality, fleeing from centralism and ideological approaches.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> F. Uribe, *Ejes del charism de Francisco de Asis segun sus escreto*, 2010, p. 73-74.

<sup>3</sup> Papa Francesco ai Superiori Generali, in A. Spadaro, *Svegliate in mondo*. Civiltà Cattolica 2014.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

At the same time, Pope Francis challenges us re-read our charism in relation to the current cultures. According to him, we are naturally obligated to re-think the enculturation of the charism, the charism is one, but it needs to be lived according to places, times and persons. “The charism is not in a bottle of distilled water. It needs to be lived with energy, re-reading it also culturally.”<sup>5</sup>

The reflection of the Holy Father continues to affirm that secularization of the post-modern era, is eroding institutional structures, the ideology of a religion that is crystallized and almost mummified, seems to offer the opportunity to observe with a new gaze the religious and human reality: a mystical pluralistic experience, perpetually current, open to every historical mediation, separated from every idolatrous temptation and manipulation of transcendence. The necessary condition for developing a mystical future is the access to the tradition that is not imitative, but on the contrary is inherited in respect to modernity, that is a vision “from open eyes,” to be able not only to perceive the instances of the policy, but instead the “*hic et nunc*” of the despair of the poor, enabling us to be open to liberating praxis, facing problems present both in the individual and on the social scale.

### 3. TO BE PROPHETS: A NON-NEGOTIABLE PRIORITY

*“A religious must never renounce prophecy”<sup>6</sup>*

Every religious life is prophetic, otherwise it does not exist. To live the prophecy of the charism, synthesized in the name, means to be a transparent sign, a manifestation, a testimony, an announcement, a foreshadowing of the future (cf. *LG 44; VC 84-85*). The sign that shows another reality and a different future, it must be visible, credible and eloquent. In order to be “prophets” we need to renew the signs of fraternity, minority, poverty, humility and Franciscan joy.

To be and to live as brothers, to build fraternity around us, to be builders of peace and reconciliation, to be with the poor and for the poor, in

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.8

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*.



solidarity and simplicity of life and to guard creation... this is what people expect from the friars minor.

Religious vows are also a prophecy and a challenge, a “spiritual therapy” for man today (VC 87-92). The priority is the significance and the prophecy of the Kingdom, “that is not negotiable”, and Pope Francis emphasized this to the Superior Generals, and went to say: “the emphasis must be to be prophets, and not to play at being one[...] Religious are men and women who illuminate the future. [...] A religious must never renounce prophecy [...] [The real] charism is to be yeast: prophecy announces the spirit of the Gospel.”<sup>7</sup>

After the second Vatican Council, the prophetic dimension was forcefully, clearly proposed in *Vita Consecrata* (1996): “Consecrated life truly constitutes a *living memorial* of Jesus’ way of *living and acting* as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relationship to the brethren” (VC 22), and still more: “Their lifestyle too must clearly show the ideal which they profess, and thus present itself as a living sign of God and as an eloquent, albeit often silent, proclamation of the Gospel” (VC 25): “By their charisms consecrated persons become signs of the Spirit pointing to a new future enlightened by faith and by Christian hope” (VC).

In prophecy there is the characteristic of novelty: new paths that the prophet knows how to point out and open, new models of acting, new forms of communal life and mission. For the prophet, life is not static, but it is always dynamic and projected outward towards the future of God. Authentic prophecy also knows how keep in harmony the institution and the Gospel. Pope Francis is the sign and the guarantee of reconciliation between the institution and charism, because every structure is referred by him to its evangelical purpose.

It is about this prophetic mission that we must question ourselves: How are we truly significant? Are we capable, as the Pope asks us, of “waking up the world”?

#### 4. THE METHODOLOGICAL ITINERARY

In this preparatory guide for the General Chapter, we propose the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

following well known methodology of “to see, to judge and to act.” When the communities reflect on these themes, one needs to add a moment of ‘celebration’ and another of ‘checking’.

In the first Chapter we considered our time in crisis, not so much in a negative sense of weakness or decadence, that provokes easy resignation, pessimism and also revolt; but above all as an opportunity for new choices, the search for the essential, for the discovery of new possibilities of a new Franciscan life.

In the second and third chapters, we wish to focus on the central theme of the General Chapter: *brothers and minors in our time*. We are friars minor in a time of crisis and change, situated in the peripheries with the priority of prophecy of the Kingdom. We are trying to identify some paradigmatic challenges to be brothers and minors in our time.

In regards to the part: “to see and to contemplate,” we will present a brief description of the issues that challenge us from outside and inside of the Order.

In regards to the part : “to judge and to meditate,” we will ask ourselves where is the Spirit leading us, while taking into consideration elements from our documents, of our reflection and that of the Church and of Pope Francis. In line with Pope Francis, we want give priority to an evangelical discernment, a outlook of faith of a missionary friar minor, an evangelizer inserted and near the people, and with St Francis we assume the criterion “to see inside and not elsewhere.” It is not enough to observe phenomenon exteriorly as changes, but it is necessary to know how “to see inside” in virtue of the Spirit and in the light of faith, so as to “to see and to believe,” above all seeing to know the presence of the Lord of history in signs. It is to have a “different gaze”, profoundly “contemplative” that sees beyond appearances.<sup>8</sup>

In regards to the part “to act, to give back” – during the journey of preparation and in particular in the General Chapter – we want to be open to questions, to points of concrete reflection in order to arrive at some proposals, choices and decisions that can help us to be friars minors, as a significant, prophetic presence, full of vitality in our time.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. C. Vaiani, *La Proposta spiritual francescana oggi*, in “Antoniano”, fasc. p. 673-682.



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# OUR TIME





## A. TIME OF CRISIS: FOR GROWING AND NOT FOR DYING

*“Today...minors among minor... with the conscientious of immersed in an era of change...”*<sup>9</sup>

We live in a time of great changes, or as some say, in a change of epoch. According to Pope Francis “humanity is experiencing a turning-point in its history, as we can see from the advances being made in so many fields” (EG 50). Therefore we want to avoid “ a diagnostic overload” and also “a purely sociological analysis” (EG 50), and to favor instead, and consider one particular aspect of our time, namely that of crisis. The current theme of humanity is crisis. It speaks of economic-financial, social, political, ethical, climatic, ecological, cultural crisis etc. Also in the Church the topic of crisis prevails: the crisis of vocation, the crisis of perseverance, the crisis of Christian fidelity and religion, the crisis of the institution, the crisis of morals etc.

In the current vocabulary, “crisis leads to decadence, weakening and failure , and so it takes on a negative meaning that generates disillusion or anger, manifestations of protest and revolt, resignation and pessimism. In this representation, crisis is a preparation for collapse and death.

Instead in the etymological meaning, “crisis” indicates the moment that separates us, it shows a way to live and to act so as to decide on a different way to a new life. Crisis indicates a change, the passage to a new life that is certainly not a without pain. The crisis is therefore a positive occasion, a opportunity for development and growth.

With this in view, we will look at the *general context of our time and the signs if crisis* that arr present with their negative and positive implications.

The globalized and centralized economic model in the mercantilist logic is a economy that generally excludes the greater part of humanity, that kills persons and natural species, that accumulates goods in the hands of a few, that exploits the resources of the planet without ethical responsibility, ecology. According to Pope Francis “Inequity is the root of social evils” (EG 202) and of violence (EG 59). Such a model favors waste. “As consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and

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<sup>9</sup> SPC 33.

marginalized: without work, without the possibilities, without means of escape. Human beings are being considered consumer goods to be used and then discarded” (EG 53). Some elements of the predominant economic model are also penetrating our fraternity and affecting the style of life. Our economy tries to adapt itself to the economy of the marketplace, we transforming our structures into assets so that they can yield profits, we have rich provinces and others are poor, we have rich fraternities and others are poor, we are concerned to be in line with the the economy of the marketplace, and then we have personal accounts that favor the tendency to consumerism and a comfortable life, and as a consequence a distancing from poverty. From the survey done among the brothers it seems clear that there is a widespread bourgeois lifestyle (26%) that dulls and weakens more and more our Franciscan identity (25%).<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, there is a growth of interest in society to find a united economy, the conscience of sustainability as a important criteria, with the centrality of the human person and of life. Inside our Order there emerges with clarity, according to the *Report* on the survey, the request for a more explicit commitment to a simpler life style (47%).

***The cultural-ethical crisis.*** All things and all creatures are viewed as a commodity to be sold, consumed and commercialized. Thus we live in a culture with the predominate mentality of consumerism, of the desire for well-being and for a comfortable life... There has developed a culture of indifference: “Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us...” (EG 54). On the other hand, it supports and increases an awareness of respect for life, for volunteering, for peace and the defense and promotion of ecology.

***The institutional crisis.*** The diverse institutions of our society have lost in good part the strength of concern for the life of individuals: the school for new generations, the state for its citizens, the churches for their faithful, the political parties for civil activists, the structures and

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. R. Mion, *Rapporto di ricerca sulla stato dell’Ordine*, Roma 2013. In seguito: *Rapporto*.

institutions of the Institute of Consecrated Life for their members and so on...

Also the institutional structure of our Order shows signs of crisis, because it seems that it no longer is able to sustain and accompany on a common path and share in the universal fraternity. A worrying disconnect is observed among the various institutional requests of the General Chapter, Minister General and General Definitory, Provinces and Provincial Ministers, Guardians and Local Ministers) in which there is no more cohesion and directions from the center are easily rejected. The Minister General with his General Definitory is rarely considered an essential reference point to be welcomed with great openness.

***The crisis of the person.*** Modern and post-modern culture have developed a strong sensibility towards autonomy, liberty, the subjectivity of the individual in which the person wishes to be autonomous, free and maker of his own story and his own choices. It establishes a continual tension, often also a conflict between the institution and the individual. The problematic side of this sensibility is the enclosing of the individual in his way of thinking and living that centers on the self. It is a celebration of absurd *individualism* as the fundamental criteria of life.

Such individualism is also widely diffused throughout the entire Fraternity, and it has been repeatedly denounced by the Minister Generals. We continue to note the existence of individual projects of works and mission and research that are satisfying to the individual brother, but this ordering of one's own life in such an autonomous and individual manner effects the provinces in such a way that community individualism becomes "provincialism," namely not being open to collaboration with other provinces and the universal Fraternity.

Such a crisis of individualism challenges our identity as a "fraternity". The positive perspective is to understand the individual person as always in relation, in an openness toward solidarity with others, in an openness to collaborate in order to find a common project of life.

***The crisis of plurality.*** In our time every culture, every religion, every ideology, every group with its own identity wishes to be recognized, valued and held on the same level as other groups. Today above all three great phenomena characterize meeting and interaction: globalization, the flood of migrants and the new technologies of communication. These realities provoke different attitudes: a) a sense of tolerance



and openness towards the different, dialogue, a sharing of knowledge, collaboration, the capacity to share in diversity and plurality; b) or: intolerance, authoritarianism, sectarianism, fundamentalism, dogmatism, racism, xenophobia; c) or still: indifference, relativism, flight into a small world, the choice of what is most comfortable, the lack of clarity in one's own identity.

In our Order there is emerging an awareness that the presence of cultural pluralism in the fraternities not only enriches them with added value, but it offers a dynamic stimulus to create new forms of evangelization. According to the *Report*, the results of about half of friars polled (44.2%) share this conviction and a considerable majority consider cultural pluralism a stimulus that could favor creativity in the field of evangelization.

***The crisis in the Order.*** In this six year period we have seen signs of crisis and also desires for change, revitalization and renewal. We have dealt with the theme of identity, understood and lived with a weak sense of belonging that reveals a crisis that has little clarity. We are now studying in depth the challenge of fidelity and perseverance in response to the phenomenon of the departure of our brothers from the Order. We have addressed and are accompanying a process of re-dimensioning and restructuring in view of the new possibilities for the vitalization of our charism. A commission has addressed the study of the situation of the Order in the contemporary cultural context. A significant group of friars complained of some aspects of a worldly life that have entered the life of fraternities and individual brothers (See the *Report*), and of insufficient attention to personal prayer (41%) that constitutes a major risk for one's own life of faith; add to this the practical difficulties of excessive work (34%), which is not always the adequate support for fraternal relations (30%) and of the guidance by superiors including the spiritual guidance; a middle class life-style and individualism have already been pointed out, and for a 10.4%, one can conclude that it would not be rare to assume also a crisis of faith. The reduction of interior tension that draws near to spiritual worldliness, that was denounced by Pope Francis, and that "consists in seeking not the Lord's glory but human glory and personal well-being" (*EG* 93). Hence the phenomenon of brothers who interiorly have abandoned the Franciscan religious life but remain in the Order, leading a double life, or building their own nest, which

makes them indifferent to the rest of the life of fraternity, or they conduct themselves in a completely autonomous manner or they even compensate their interior discomfort with various stratagems. It was stated that “mediocrity is already a perversion” (A. Cecini). The expressed reports of the survey certainly speaks of some needs that are unfulfilled and desires that one would wish could be fulfilled. In fact, it asks a more explicit commitment to a simpler life style (47%), the improvement of the quality of personal relations in the fraternities (53.9%), and a strong commitment to evangelization and a missionary spirit (40.7%).

The brothers who were polled, expressed also the need for support in the spiritual-supernatural area (prayer, testimony, charity), in the symbolic-cultural area (culture, updating, various contacts) and in the psychological-personal area (vocation church, sharing) [*Sintesi del rapporto*, p. 21].

Many brothers expressed concern for the care of our charism, the need to integrate more and more the active life with their own life of faith and showing an openness to critical review (68.8%), availability to be involved in a process of renewal (43.2%) and also to be motivated by a certain enthusiasm by what may be new (23.7%).

## **B. TOWARDS A NEW QUALITY OF EVANGELICAL LIFE**

*The Gospel changed the life of St. Francis and it changes the life of each of us”*<sup>11</sup>

St. Francis was called “the saint of crisis” because he lived his own crises as moments of “conversion” and he knew how to resolve in a positive way the great critical contradictions between being and having, between the fraternity and the hierarchy, between the cross and joy. Man is in crisis because he wants to manage and save himself, instead of allowing himself to be saved by God. St. Francis instead welcomes everything from God and in his own nothingness, he places all his trust in the Lord and from this is also born a trust in himself; he removes the worldly incrustations to emerge a source of being.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *PdV* 5.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. F. Hahjadj, *Francesco d’Assisi, il santo della crisi*, in “L’utopia di Fran-

From the provocations that come from the periphery of the world we feel strongly challenged to rediscover the authenticity of our Franciscan life, that, according to the *Report*, is felt by many of the young and is also a stimulus for the elders to be truly attractive role models. It asks for a return to the essential, what we recognize in the name “brothers and minors”; that helps us to overcome the functionality based on the deadening values of the world that reduces consecrated life to a role, to a job, to a profession.

Prophecy and a renewed quality of life forces us to live Christian and Franciscan “distinctiveness.” It is that distinctiveness that St. Paul asks of the Christians of Rome; “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is good and pleasing and perfect “ (*Rm* 12:2). The same distinctive or evangelical specificity that was “the generous, loving perfect ideal” (2 *Cel* Prologue,2) of St. Francis, who “was always concerned to know and follow the will of the Lord” ( *LP o Compilatio Assisiensis* 6).

The reflection of the Plenary Council of the Order (=CPO) that was celebrated in Poland speaks of the “new wine” that the Lord has given to us in his Person and in the his Gospel, as it relates to our structures; that “wine of the Gospel which is always new and of our *forma vita*” that needs “new wineskins,” new or renovated structures that can be of service to the integral vocation of the brothers, and to promote and facilitate the animation and the fidelity of our being brothers-in-mission for others.”<sup>13</sup>

We are invited by Pope Francis to be courageous: “Do not be afraid of the newness of the Gospel, do not be afraid of the new things that the Holy Spirit does in us, do not be afraid of the renewal of structures!” (*Homily*, Casa Santa Marta, July 6, 2013).

## C. CHOICES AND CONCRETE PROPOSALS

What strategies or methods do you plan to put in place to overcome the negative vision of the present crises, to see them as an opportunity

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cesco d’Assisi”, Padova,2013.

<sup>13</sup> CPO 2013, *Decisioni e proposte*, n. 20

and to transform them into positive opportunities for the future?

What commitments and concrete choices should you or could you take in this direction?



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# BROTHERS

*“be a prophetic fraternity in the world today”*

Papa Benedetto XVI





## II.1. BROTHERS AMONG US

### A. The Challenge of interpersonal relations

*“Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the ideal of fraternal love”<sup>14</sup>*

Interpersonal relations of communion in our fraternities are often confronted with the widespread individualism, that has already been mentioned, that it has absorbed from the surrounding culture, that affirms the complete autonomy of the person, releasing reason and freedom from every chain, both ontological and moral, and even denying sexual otherness.<sup>15</sup>

Pope Francis has also denounced the Church, in which we recognize ourselves, “a heightened *individualism*, a *crisis of identity* and a cooling fervor. These are three evils which fuel one another” (EG 78).

The *Report* of the survey to the brothers of the Order shows the major difficulties in living with joy their own religious and Franciscan profession that shows of a lack of interpersonal communication in the fraternities (21%). The lack of satisfying relations in the life of the fraternity shows also the first difficulty that makes the observance of the vow of chastity problematic and fragile (41.8%). The vow of obedience is often confronted by a strong personal search for one’s own autonomy, or individualism (36.1%), and with attitudes of pride and personal pride.

Fraternal communion is made difficult due to excessive work or by daily routine that alienates a person from the life of the fraternity. (34%), aggravates the lack of support on the part of the brothers (30%), in other terms, it is a dramatic and suffering cry of many brothers that translates itself in a form of isolation, of individualism, of little fraternal charity, of poor accompaniment and interest, of little reciprocal care and atten-

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<sup>14</sup> EG 101

<sup>15</sup> Cf. G. Buffon. *Ad lectores*, in “Antonianum” cit.



tion to the life of brothers in their personal work, in loving and cordial interest (not curiosity or gossip), that makes the fraternity a true family. In a word, we can identify it as the difficulty to create and manage with continuity interpersonal relations” (*Rapporto*, p.67).

We record, however, the great appreciation expressed in the *Report* for the fraternal life that is actually present and the commitment of many fraternities in the Order to live in authentic fraternal communion. This is also a dream, a desire of the younger generations of brothers who, despite their inconsistencies, aspire to live and to testify to an authentic Franciscan fraternity.

## **B. Towards building a communion of life**

*“Let them love one another...Let them express the love they have for one another by their deeds”*<sup>16</sup>

The need to improve fraternal communion in the Order has always been the concern of the Minister Generals. It was stressed as the necessity to “invest in a significant fraternity”, rather than an “efficient one” (Giacomo Bini, 2003). It was a call to the necessity to live a fraternity and a communion whose construction will never be finished; a fraternity and a communion built on sacrifice, on dying to self, because it gives birth to the fraternal life” (José R. Carballo 2006). It was reaffirmed that “the world, and also we, hunger for fraternity in which God breathes and where there is humanity, places of encounter and friendship, of mutual trust, of welcome and support, of forgiveness, of serenity and celebration.” (José R. Carballo).

The majority of these brothers who were polled believe that in order to re-vitalize the Order it is necessary in the first place to better the fraternal quality of relations in the Fraternity (53.9%).

The reasons and the ways to build a new and better fraternal communion are part of our spiritual patrimony, and are repeatedly proposed in various initiatives of ongoing formation, although with little success

The recent Plenary Council reaffirmed the fundamental structure of

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<sup>16</sup> *Rnb* 11, 5-6.

the Order is the person of the brother-in-relation, and that the call to fraternal communion is founded on communion with Christ and it characterizes of our identity, “it sustains freedom as sons of God, [...] and it fills us with joy that can flow only from a personal intimacy with Christ. The life of communion, of communion with Christ, communion with the brothers, communion with all persons and with all creation, is the heart of the vocation of every brother, and it is therefore fundamental to our identity as Friars Minors.”<sup>17</sup>

Pope Francis has also fully developed this aspect of religious life, he considers it in the context of a humanity that needs reconciliation and peace that are founded on the universal vocation to fraternity: “humanity carries inscribed upon itself the vocation to fraternity, but also the dramatic possibility of betrayal”. The Holy Father reminds us that true fraternity is founded on the Fatherhood of God, it is reborn in and by Christ, that it generates and produces social peace because it creates equilibrium between liberty and justice, between personal responsibility and solidarity, between individual good and the common good. Moreover fraternity helps to build and cultivate nature, and because this fraternity needs to be discovered, loved, experienced, announced and evidenced, but only the love given by God that allows us to welcome and freely live fraternity.”<sup>18</sup>

In order to heal the difficulties of interpersonal relations from fatigue of living and building relationships of communion, Pope Francis proposes to the Church and to us, to build “a *mystical* fraternity, a contemplative fraternity. It is a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbor, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeing happiness of others as their heavenly Father does” (EG 92).

Our General Constitutions point out that with Franciscan realism “all the brothers are to have among themselves, to the highest degree, a family spirit and mutual friendship. They are to practice courtesy, cheerfulness and all other virtues in such a way that, united in real fraternity and encouraging one another unceasingly to hope, peace and joy” (GGCC 39).

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<sup>17</sup> CPO 2013, *Principi ispirazionali*, n. 6-12.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Message for World Day of Peace*, 2014.

If a person fails to live fraternity and is not able to live religious life, the Pope stated before the Superior Generals, and to the Poor Clares of the Proto-monastery in Assisi he asked that they be more human and more true. For us the call is to be brothers in order infect everyone with our style of life of “fraternity in minority”.

### **C. Choices and concrete proposals**

What strategies and means can be put into action to build relations of communion in local fraternities and in the entities?

What concrete commitment do you propose in order to be “prophecy in fraternity”?

## II. 2. BROTHERS OF ALL CREATURES

### A. The Challenge of relations with all creatures

*“Yes to new relations with every creature”*<sup>19</sup>

Next to an always more widespread individualism, our time is marked by every type of pluralism. The “crisis of plurality” that we have pointed out above (I.A) challenges our Fraternity to know how to build interpersonal relations with other groups, be they internal or external, diverse groups of culture, religion and ethnicity. The brothers are normally in contact with persons and groups that come from forced immigration, that are the bearer of diverse anthropologies. There is also the challenge of the proliferation of new religious movements that at times tend to fundamentalism or they seem to propose a spirituality without God and thus represent a cultural challenge to evangelization.<sup>20</sup>

The more specific places of pluralism and multiculturalism are the cities where “The religious dimension of life is expressed by different lifestyles, daily rhythms linked to places and people” (EG 72). In the cities, new cultures are constantly being born, new languages, symbols, messages, paradigms of life, new sects and new groups.<sup>21</sup> All these phenomenon in evolution challenge us Franciscans, and all Christians to know how to open and maintain a dialogue that is respectful, welcoming and that promote peaceful coexistence.

A difficult and very problematic relation is found with creation. Pope Francis states: “we are often driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. EG 87-92.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. EG 63.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. EG 73-74

generations.”<sup>22</sup> Our Order has already moved in this direction by participating in ecological movements and establishing on all levels the service for justice, peace and the safeguarding of creation, however we recognize that a true Franciscan ecology has not yet been developed and has not entered into the general sensibilities of the brothers.

In our way of thinking, interpersonal relations extend to other Franciscan communities (the Franciscan family), to local ecclesial communities (ecclesial fraternities), to relations diverse human groups (universal fraternities) and with all living and non-living beings that are in creation (cosmic fraternity). Fraternity is an essential dimension of our charism that asks us always if we “brothers” to all and everywhere.

We are like every Christian invited to “overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today’s world imposes on us [...] to go out of ourselves and to join other is healthy for us”.<sup>23</sup> “Today when the networks and means of human communication have made unprecedented advances, we sense the challenge of finding and sharing a “mystique” of living together, of mingling and encounter, of embracing and supporting one another, of stepping into this flood tide which, while chaotic, can become a genuine experience of fraternity, a caravan of solidarity, a sacred pilgrimage” (EG 87).

## **B. Towards dialogue with all and the care of creation**

*“Proclaim the Gospel in the whole world, to every creature”<sup>24</sup>*

The world has a great need of fraternity and to see that it is possible to live together in diversity. In this time marked by difference, we friars minor are challenged to give a concrete response. The recent Plenary Council reminded us that “the foundation of the vocation of every friar minor is the call by God to live in communion with Him, with the brothers and with whole world”.<sup>25</sup> We should listen to the “experts” in fraternity and those committed to witness and the spread of those con-

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<sup>22</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for World Day of Peace* 2014.

<sup>23</sup> EG 87-88.

<sup>24</sup> GGCC 83§1.

<sup>25</sup> CPO 2013, *Principi ispirazionali* n. 8.

crete manifestations that characterize the “Franciscan Fraternity”, namely: equality among all (cf. *RnB* 5,9-17); reciprocity in love, in service; subsidiarity based on mutual trust; mercy that knows how to welcome, to correct and to pardon; joy and gladness that everyone knows transmits simple and sincere communion.<sup>26</sup>

The second condition, which is the result of the first, is to *transform life in common to a communion of life*. The “communion of life is everything” (José Maria Arnaiz). For where there is communion, there is life. Today we are called to create communion in fraternity, the first element of mission.<sup>27</sup>

The third condition is to return to being the *new singers and custodians of creation*, after the example of St. Francis, recognizing the footprints of the Lord and that “grammatica” that is inscribed in it and that is the best resources for the benefit of humanity.<sup>28</sup> Our General Constitutions say to us: “Following closely in the footsteps of Saint Francis, the friars are to maintain a reverent attitude towards nature, threatened from all sides today, in such a way that they may restore it completely to its condition of brother and to its role of usefulness to all mankind for the glory of God the Creator (*GGCC* 71).

### **C. Choices and concrete proposals**

What strategies or means can be put into action to build unity in diversity, internally and externally, and to form fraternities that are custodians of creation?

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. F. Uribe, *Ejes del carisma*, cit. p. 56-57

<sup>27</sup> Cf. M. Johri, ofmcap, *Il contributo del francescani per la nuova evangelizzazione*, privato.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Messaggio per la giornata della pace 2014



## II. 3 . BROTHERS “IN A PERMANENT STATE OF MISSION”<sup>29</sup>

### A. New scenarios for a new evangelization

*“Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel.”<sup>30</sup>*

The Synod of Bishops on “the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith” (October 7-28, 2012) has examined the new human scenarios into which the evangelization of the Church is called to be renewed. In particular the following scenarios were found:

***The cultural scenario.*** It is centred on secularization and “presents itself today in our cultures through the positive image of liberation, the possibility to imagine the life of the world and humanity without reference to the transcendent”<sup>31</sup> Only in some cases do we see an anti-Christian anti-religious or anti-clerical tone. Instead it has developed as a widespread mentality wherein God no longer has a place or is absent. God is no longer perceived as necessary. This mentality has also entered the ecclesial communities while there is a widespread hedonistic, consumeristic mentality together with forms of individualistic or esoteric spirituality .

But what unites believers and the secularized is the human: We can have common ground on what is humanly true and serious.

***The social scenario.*** It is characterised by migration and globalization. The great migration phenomenon favours “a meeting, and a mixing of cultures” ( IL 55) and also “the crumbling of the fundamental reference points of life” (ibid) such as the traditional values, family ties etc. Globalization contains the negative aspects (spec. economic) but also the possibility of growth (new forms of solidarity and development).

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<sup>29</sup> EG 25

<sup>30</sup> EG 97

<sup>31</sup> Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum laboris* (Rome 2012). Hereafter, *IL*



**The economic scenario.** There is an increase in the gap between the rich and the poor, which generates unjust inequalities and causes tension and violence. In addition, the global economic crisis has opened the issue of the use of natural and human resources (workers).

**The political scenario.** “The emergence on the world scene, of new economic, political and religious actors, such as the Islamic world, emerging Asia, has created a situation unheard of and completely unknown, rich with potentialities but also full of risks and new temptations of domination and power” ( IL 57). These new challenges call forth new responses from the part of the ecclesial community.

**The technical- scientific scenario .** Developments in this field are many and marvellous but also present “dangers of high expectations and manipulation” ( IL 58). Science becomes a new religion in the form of gnosis in which scientific knowledge is the new wisdom of life. It is giving birth to “ the religion of prosperity”.

**The communications-scenario.** The new digital technologies and information technology have given rise to a new “place “ for public life, to a new social space, in which the ties are able to influence society and culture. The processes of media come to transform reality itself promoting an extension of human potential. There are benefits and risks including the culture of the ephemeral, the immediate, of the apparent/virtual with no memory and no future. These means of communication are perceived as very important for inculturation of the gospel, and only then as means to be used for the evangelization, but with critical discernment and with wisdom and responsibility.

**The religious scenario.** One finds even a return of the religious sense and the need for variety of spiritualities. Varied and in different places are the signs of a revival of religion. There are also, however, phenomena of religious fundamentalism, of the proliferation of religious groups that take the form of sects. On the one hand the Christians must remain faithful to the gospel message, and on the other hand they must be ready for open and constructive dialogue<sup>32</sup>.

Pope Francis wished to go beyond, by choosing to “propose some orientations that can encourage and guide a *new phase evangelization* full of fervour and vitality throughout the church.” (EG 17). In the first place

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. IL n. 51-75

,he develops the self-evangelization for the Church, an socially oriented internal renewal “to outline a definite evangelising style that - the Pope says - I invite you to adopt in every activity you undertake” (EG 18). Therefore he rightly affirms “God save us from a worldly Church with superficial spiritual and pastoral trappings! This stifling worldliness can only be healed by breathing in the pure air of the Holy Spirit who frees us from self-centredness cloaked in an outward religiosity bereft of God. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the Gospel!” (EG 97)

From the report of the *Survey* it emerges that there is a general commitment of the friars in the work of evangelisation, in particular to strengthen the ecclesial life, and the willingness to walk toward something open, positive, in the face of a certain pessimism. There is also the widespread desire for a better future, for renewal, on the part of the majority of the friars. However there is also a gap between the answers which often express wishes, and the real life which does not correspond to the answers to the questionnaire. Thus for example, there is an almost complete absence of a reflection on the *missio ad gentes*, absent also in the questionnaire. And we know the great decrease in the missionary thrust, clearly indicated by the difficulty to have new missionaries “ad gentes”, while it is common knowledge that the Order has been strengthened and grew when it was missionary. In the *Survey* there is also a lack sufficient evaluation of the ministry of shrines which are so numerous in the Order. On the other hand, there appears to be an excessive number of parishes, with nearly half the number of friars of the world involved in parish ministry.

## **B. Toward a missionary conversion with new evangelizers**

*“All the friars share in the mandate of evangelization of the whole Church...”*<sup>33</sup>

At the Porziuncola St. Francis of Assisi had the revelation that he was called to be both a faithful disciple and an authentic witness of Lord Jesus. Evangelization is included in the gift of a vocation. Evangelization/

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<sup>33</sup> CCGG 8§2

mission is the reason for our being friars minor. All of us have been called and sent to bring the good news to all peoples (cf. Lord 5-11). “All the friars – affirm our General Constitutions – are to share in the task of evangelization that belongs to whole Church. And, after the example of Saint Francis who “made a tongue out of his whole body“, the friars are to be ready to receive the inspiration of the Lord, and wherever they have been called and sent, they are to build up all nations in word and deed through the purity of their entire life” (GGCC 83 § 2). All the friars minor are “bearers of the gift of the Gospel” (General Chapter 2009) between the people and to all peoples (ad and inter gentes).

Pope Francis says: . I dream of a “missionary option”, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. (EG 27). He calls the community of the disciples to be “a Church which goes forth” (EG 20 ff. ) and declares that “the Church which ‘goes forth’ is a Church with open doors” (EG 46). We could also speak of , an Order that “goes forth “ and an Order with the doors open.

The Pope invites us to go forth toward the “frontiers of mission” that he identifies especially in marginalization and poverty -- both material and moral, in the culture of the ‘oneness’ and fluidity of thought , by education where you can pass on the faith through knowledge and values. The last General Chapter of 2009 has invited us to “live on the frontiers” (PdV 22-24 ), the frontiers that “for some become impassable, and for others almost nonexistent. The phenomenon of immigration is part of this dialectic, especially when it comes to refugees [ ...] theirs is an itinerancy in poverty and minority” (PdV 23). The Chapter asked : “ Can we, Friars Minor, find a social space where these values of our charism are better represented? An evangelical presence among them would be a sign of restitution, particularly eloquent in this world where only the flow of money, in goods and services, is in free exchange, but not the people, and much less the poor, sacrament of God’s Son who was poor and a guest “ (Ibid. ).

Other frontiers to “inhabit “ are the places of human conflict and violence, places that call for reconciliation, ideological and religious pluralism, the nature that is abused and violated. “Evangelizing involves

the search to make our boundaries porous to allow the flow of the intercommunion and inter-communication” (PdV22). And the Pope reiterates: “We are all asked to accept this call: to come out of our comfort zone and have the courage to reach all the peripheries that need the light of the Gospel” (EG 20).

A fraternity that is “going forth” requires as “signs” to “have churches with open doors” (EG 47), to “offer spaces for prayer and communion with innovative, more attractive, and meaningful features” (EG 73), to develop solidarity with the poor and collaboration with other religious and social initiatives. The appeals of the Pope in this sense are explicit: we are “a pilgrim and evangelizing people who transcend every, although necessary institutional expression” (EG 111), we need to be a fraternity that is “leaven of God in the midst of humanity....., a place where God’s mercy is freely given” (EG 114) because “mission is a constant stimulus not to remain mired in mediocrity but to continue to grow. (EG 121).

For us, friars minor, “to go forth”, means: want to review many of our habits, a willingness to make changes in our way of life, with humility and patience, to have the courage to always feel we are on the way, not be afraid to get down and dirty our hands for having walked in the streets, and not close in on ourselves, to cling to our own safety (cf. EG 49), to prefer the quality of fraternal life rather than keeping the places that we have (structures); “in fact we cling with ease to houses, ideas and anything else, and we don’t realize that these can become our cemeteries”<sup>34</sup>.

We must not forget “the social dimension of the evangelization” so clearly indicated by Paul VI in *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) and taken up and updated by Pope Francis in *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), not to “disfigure” the overall sense of the evangelizing mission. The *kerygma* is that of the Kingdom of God, and every witness or word of the gospel has a communitarian and social repercussion. There is a constant interaction between the Gospel lived and proclaimed on the one hand, and the concrete personal and social life of the person on the other. Pope Francis writes: The Gospel is about the kingdom of God (cf. *Lk* 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in our world. To the extent that He reigns with-

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<sup>34</sup> M. Jöhri, *The contribution of Franciscans for the new Evangelization*, Private

in us, the life of society will be a setting for universal fraternity, justice, peace and dignity. Both Christian preaching and life, then, are meant to have an impact on society. ( EG 180)

### **C. Choices and concrete proposals**

Which strategies or means do you propose in order to put into operation in order to regain the momentum, the missionary zeal, among in the friars

What “missionary policy” can you establish in your Entities and propose to the Order?

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## MINORS

*“Dear Brothers, please cherish minority”*  
Pope Francis





# III. 1.

## MINORITY , A KEY ELEMENT OF FRANCISCAN IDENTITY

*“All the friars are minors and submissive to all...”*<sup>35</sup>

### A. The crisis of identity in a world that changes

*“No” to a minority that is alienated!*

Identity crisis is one of the crises in our society. For religious life and even in our Fraternities , the signs of the crisis - especially in some geographical areas - can be recognized at least in the following aspects: the fast “reduction” in the number of personnel (very few vocations, and ageing), the flattening of and the reduction of religious life to the minimum, the bourgeois style of life, growing individualism (at the centre there is no longer God but the “I” at any cost); activism above one’s capacity, and the loss of the “spirit” (spiritual disillusionment); mission or apostolate understood and lived more as work or activity (supplementary) rather than as a “witness”; “duplicity” of membership (religious who identify too much with the ecclesial movements).

But it is important to go to the *roots of the crisis* . A “cause” or factor of the crisis of religious life, as also of the crisis of the Church in general is *from the outside* , i.e. , from the changes in cultures and civilisations, from the loss of values, etc. Often the world, in the problematic sense, has entered the cloister, into the rooms of religious (through the Internet and various new means of communication: Face-book, Skype, Twitter... ). However, there is also, perhaps above all, a *inner root cause* that consists in the lowering of the quality of life of its members, the spiritual anemia, the widespread intolerance of rules and the vows. In this sense, in its totality, the crisis is a judgment of God and a test in view of purification <sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rnb 7, 1-2

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. B. Maggioni, *Alle radici della sequela*, p. 104-105.



According to the *Survey*, the friars denounce some factors or situations that negatively affect the life style as “minors” and accordingly on the fidelity to our identity. The main negative situations are recognized in a very secularized style of life in the life of brotherhood (64 %), in the initial formation that is too comfortable-- where everything is ensured and one gets used to a comfortable life (61.4 %), lack of a supernatural, Christological vision (59.2 %) of minority, and the lack of a shared project of minority (52.4 %). On the other hand, there are only a few friars who think that one must earn one’s living with one’s work (18 %), even fewer are those who believe in the importance of sharing of material goods with the poor (14 %) or to practice effective solidarity with the victims of injustice or alleviate the poverty of others (13 %).

On these aspects that “deform” life in minority, the friars show a broad consensus. However, there is not the same consensus on the influence that is to be attributed to the attachment to positions of the past, the adaptation to today’s society for types of the apostolate, the discomfort caused by economic dependence, the separation between priests and laity: for some even these factors have a negative influence, while other assessments differ and are more complex.

Other signs that indicate how friars find it increasingly difficult to be minors, and to live as minors, are the comfortable and safe standard of living of our fraternities that are not affected by the general economic crisis, the difficulty to rise above personal pride that ruins interpersonal relations, the difficulties to exercise authority as a service on one hand, and to obey the ministers on the other hand, and then the widespread practice of wrongly “appropriating” money received, or offices one holds; or, the activities and works considered personal.

In other words, it is noted that many friars have the need to rediscover the profound meaning of minority that involves the relationship with God, with oneself and with others and with the universe. This includes humility, service and mutual obedience, power-sharing, obedience to the Church, the “sine proprio” and solidarity<sup>37</sup>

It is to be noted, however, that many fraternities in the Order live in

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<sup>37</sup> Cfr. F. Uribe, “*Omnes vocentur fratres minores (Rnb 6.3)*”. *Hacia a identificación de minoridad de los Escritos de San Francisco de Asi’s*, in “La Verdad y Vida” 236 (2003) 63-104.

simplicity, with an austere life style, also willing to hand over the “surplus” of their local earnings, open to challenges and emergencies that come to their attention.

## **B. Toward a prophetic style of life, in minority**

*“I want a Church that is poor for the poor”*<sup>38</sup>

Francis answered the Cardinal of Ostia: “ My Lord, precisely for this were my brothers called minor-- because they do not presume to be majors” ( *2 Cel* 148). “The word *minors* describes the manner of *how* to be brothers and *how* to live and proclaim the Gospel. In other words: the name indicates first a program of life, a unique way to understand and to express our relationship with God, with others and with creation, and to put ourselves at the service of the Church and the world”<sup>39</sup> To be minors is the radical expression of following of Christ, who emptied himself, lowered himself( *kenosis* ), washed the feet and joined with the fragile and sinful humanity. Minority is the concrete way to live the *sine proprio* , the disappropriation with regard to God, the brothers, themselves and the whole of creation.

The *sine proprio /minoritas*, then, defines the Franciscan way to live the vows: obedience that “confounds every desire *of one’s own* “ ( *Sal-Virt* 14), poverty and humility because of which the friars “really live without anything of their own” ( *Adm* 11; cf. *Adm* 8; 14), and chastity because of which one resists the desire to appropriate one’s own body and that of another(cf. *2Cel* 113,114 ). Minority as giving up of any dominance and possession also means rejection of violence and oppression, and ,therefore a strong choice for reconciliation and peace<sup>40</sup> .

Minority, together with fraternity, are qualities that characterize us and identify us most as Franciscans. The challenge we face is to truly live what we have promised: “to follow more closely the self-emptying of the

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<sup>38</sup> *EG* 198.

<sup>39</sup> *Pilgrims and strangers in this world. Study Manual on Ongoing Formation on Chapter IV of the General Constitutions OFM* , Rome 2008, p. 14 . .

<sup>40</sup> For the close connection between “minoritas” and “sine proprio “; cf. C. Vaiani, *La Via di Francesco* , Milan, 1993, p. 39.

Savior. And to show it more clearly the friars embrace the life and the social condition of the little ones , always living among them as minors; in this social position they contribute to the coming of the Kingdom of God”<sup>41</sup> and “live in this world as advocates of justice, heralds and agents of peace, overcoming evil and doing good.”<sup>42</sup> This implies reviewing and renewing our life with God , the daily life-style, the way of doing evangelization and going on a mission, in the light of us being minors.

The dimension of minority must also apply to the manner of living interpersonal relations and the service of authority, as mentioned in the CPO 2013: “Friar Francis in his writings shows us a ‘ typically minority –way ’ to live brotherly relations and exercise authority “as servants and subject to all, peaceful and humble of heart” (GGCC 64), without appropriating the roles and offices.”<sup>43</sup> This would help to overcome interpersonal conflicts, to strengthen the sense of trust and sense of belonging, to sustain fidelity and perseverance, and to instil into Ministers “a radical spirit of openness”. The “ minority- way” to live the brotherhood also helps to avoid the “abuse in fraternal communion” on the part of the brothers<sup>44</sup>

### **C. Choices and concrete proposals**

What strategies or means do you propose to put in place to build a prophetic life style in minority?

At the level of local , provincial and universal fraternity, what do you think are the choices and commitments that need to be made , to live the profession of minority?

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<sup>41</sup> GGCC 66 § 1

<sup>42</sup> GGCC 68 § 1

<sup>43</sup> CPO 2013, *Inspirational Principles* , n. 14.

<sup>44</sup> CPO 2013, *ibid.* , n . 15-17.

## III. 2

# ECONOMY AND MINORITY

### A. The challenge of an economy of transparency and solidarity

*“No” to an economy based on exclusion and inequality”*<sup>45</sup>

The current economic model promotes the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few people and causes the poverty of many. Families and whole populations are victims of the dominant economy which is characterized by an economy of exclusion since it marginalizes the weak, and it is an economy based on staggering inequality, since it deprives people of necessities. When money becomes an idol, a fetish, the human person becomes its slave and in fact it denies the primacy of the human person. Hence the need to find an ethic, which refers to a God who is outside and above the laws of the market.<sup>46</sup> An economy that does not put the human person at the centre, does not respect the environment and nature, is unjust in the present and irresponsible toward the future of the new generations. At the same time, there is also an extensive search and desire for an economy which is supportive, more fraternal, human, based on real needs, based on sustainability, respectful of the human person, nature and the environment.

Some of the logic of the market economy has also entered our Franciscan world. Pope Francis strongly affirmed: “Money must serve, not rule.” (EG 58). According to the report on the *Survey*, many friars denounce the middle class lifestyle of the Fraternity, a too comfortable style of life in the houses of formation, a type of secularization of the spirit of the friars minor. These are complaints that express at the same time a regret of what we no longer are and a desire of what one would like to do and live in order to feel truly “friars minor” in our time. In fact, 47 percent of the respondents called for explicit and direct efforts

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<sup>45</sup> EG 53.

<sup>46</sup> An in-depth analysis in this sense is found in EG 52-59,

to make life simple and in solidarity with people. A commitment that can lead to a transformation of each friar into “a prophetic sign that denounces the false values of our time” ( GGCC 67).

On the other hand, we know that a particular economy or economic management expresses a style of life. The reports of the general visitors on this point generally agree that, far too often, there is in the Provinces, an economy that is not transparent, and in many cases is individualistic, geared towards improving the standard of living more than solidarity and sharing. And the *Survey* shows how the need to work for an economy that is equitable in solidarity (19.2 %) or to promote forms of political, social and cultural participation (12.2 %) is rather low among the friars.

In the letter to the Order for the feast of St. Francis in 2012<sup>47</sup>, the General Definitory asked: “ How can we live today in a faithful and meaningful way our choice of poverty, solidarity, witness, and turn into an opportunity the negative situation which we call “crisis”? The suffering of many people, especially the weaker ones, is a source of concern for us, eager to continue to be *the brothers of the people*”. The letter continued by saying that “the current crisis may be for us a call of the Spirit, a “time of grace” to change our vision of the world and to become people with solidarity. For this reason it cannot leave us indifferent, but should provoke us, in the local and provincial Fraternities , a demanding reality testing on our style of life, on the practical implementation of the *sine proprio* , on the economic organization of our institutions, our ability to share with the poor and the marginalized. Starting with the inner life of our Fraternity, shouldn't the present socio-economic emergency awaken in each Friar willingness for sharing and reciprocity? How do we justify personal bank accounts or the keeping for oneself the goods ( stipends, pensions, offerings...) that belong to the Fraternity and which ought to be shared with the poor and the needy? Are we honest with paying the taxes? Are we in the second place in with regard to the law with our workers? [ ...] How can we instil courage and hope in the newly poor, if we ourselves do not have the ability to do with less, with our many “ un necessary needs “? Shouldn't the austerity caused by the crisis make

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<sup>47</sup> *The Friars Minor in the current crisis. A letter from the General Definitory for the feast of Saint Francis 2012.*

us reconsider the use of movable property (e.g. : accumulation of money, cf. GGCC 82 § 3; and our trust in the Providence’) and real estate (many empty buildings )? How many families evicted from their homes, how many immigrants without fixed abode, how many associations dealing with assistance could take advantage of the many unused dwellings that we have? And, the money-- in which banks do we prefer to deposit it? Today, it seems necessary, first of all to know how banks use our savings: to promote economic, social, cultural projects that respect human rights and the care of creation or for activities contrary to our ethical principles.

## **B. Toward an economy of communion and solidarity**

*“The brothers are to use money in a way that befits the poor”* (GGCC 82 § 1 )

Our spirituality and tradition offer us very important keys for discernment and reading reality. St. Francis was convinced that all the goods, both spiritual and material, belong to God who gives them for the good of all: these do not belong to us personally (cf. *Rnb* 17.18 ). We received them as stewards to put them at the service of all. This vision of Francis agrees with the teaching of the Fathers on the universal goal of goods. This is the teaching of the social Magisterium of post-conciliar Church.

This is related to the concept of restitution. For Francis sharing or solidarity is a logical consequence of his concept of property. For him, God is the only master of all the goods that He distributes generously to all people (cf. *2Cel* 77). The use of things is determined by the need: things belong to those who need them. For Francis, the gift of the mantle to the poor is nothing but a restitution, understood as justice: he felt like a thief if he did not share what he had with those who had a greater need (cf. *2Cel* 87; 92).

In the profession we promised to use things “in poverty and humility”, and to use the goods in such a manner as to be “shared for the benefit of the poor” ( GGCC 72 § 1.3 ). The General Constitutions also ask all the friars that they “consider work and service as a gift of God,

for which they present themselves as minors whom no one need fear because they seek to serve and not to dominate “ ( GGCC 76 § 1).

Admitting that our poverty is always a little abnormal, since it never indicates a total insecurity or lack of safety, we recognize that the word “poverty” “does not indicate the total lack of goods but rather a sobriety and essentiality in the use of things, an *ethic of the “ it is enough”* that opposes, in many ways, the current consumer society. If we want to become more poor materially, let us begin to *share the goods* that we use with the poor of our time”<sup>48</sup> .

Again, Pope Francis tells Christian community, and also us: I exhort you to generous solidarity and to the return of economics and finance to an ethical approach which favours human beings ( EG 58).

And in the letter cited for the feast of St. Francis in 2012, the General Definitory stated: “ The choices we make in the area of consuming, saving and sharing are important additions (or substractions) to building up an economy of solidarity that serves every person and all people. For this reason we need to be aware that this new economy will not be the result of economic policy decisions alone, but will also arise from our lives and actions.

If a transparent and communal economy nourishes fraternal communion , then the economy of sharing will truly make us brothers of the poor and the least. This is certainly a testimony that provides an alternative for society, namely, to be free from blind individual sin and self- interest , and to be open instead to concrete solidarity and justice. Taking this path seems to be best way to honour our Father and Brother Francis.”

### ***C. Choices and concrete proposals***

What strategies or means do you propose to put in place in order to have an economy that is fraternal, transparent and in solidarity with the poor?

What choices do you think are necessary to make our Franciscan economy an alternative current economic model?

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<sup>48</sup> *Pilgrims and strangers in this world* , cit. p. 89.

### III. 3.

## THE WORLD OF THE POOR AND THE EXCLUDED

#### A. The poor challenge us

“*And they must be happy when they live among the poor, the weak...*”<sup>49</sup>

The poor of today are recognizable in an extraordinarily varied range of categories, that goes well beyond only the materially poor. We recognize as poor the sick, the excluded and marginalised, and the despised and forgotten, the desperate and those devoid of meaning and hope in life, those hungry for food and for God, the most fragile, the less gifted and the weak, women who are shunned and abused, children not yet born, the homeless, drug addicts, migrants, victims of trafficking in persons, refugees, indigenous peoples and people on the margins, the elders who have been abandoned, and also creation that is exploited and abused. In the face of so much human misery, inspired by St. Francis, Pope Francis reminds us: “Small but strong in the love of God, as St. Francis of Assisi, all Christians are called to take care of the fragility of the people and the world in which we live” (EG 216).

In a more timely manner, the General Chapter of 2009, has said: “In virtue of his incarnation, the Word puts himself on side of the periphery, of vulnerability, poverty. We must not forget, therefore, that “our minority, that has Christ as paradigm [ ... ], must be translated into courageous decisions that lead us to abandon some social and ecclesial situations, and to choose with greater decisiveness places of the frontier and the margins, which are an integral part of our tradition” (PdV 23).

Today, many friars and many entities are close to the poor, the marginalized, the sick, the street people, the suffering. According to the report of the *Survey* on the situation of the Order, a large group of the friars are engaged in the field of social services in favour of the poor, the

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<sup>49</sup> *Rnb* 9, 2.



elderly and the sick (22.1 %) and attention to the poor is important for the life of the friars. The *Survey* also reveals other significant data. The simple life of the people, with whom the friar works becomes a source and a stimulus to his spiritual development (89.1 %), while less incisive is the sharing of one's life with the poor and the marginalized (28 %). The need for a more direct immersion in the life of the poor/marginalized is felt by 30.8 % of the sample: this is about 1 friar on 3! It is a sensibility that makes one think of another above mentioned priority, namely, of the simple and integral life-style, which basically you can connect with solidarity. About a third of the friars felt the need to work for the poor, drug addicts, people with AIDS, alcoholics, and homeless people (32.9 %). Smaller is the number of friars who ask to live a life in with the poor, the marginalized, the drug-addicts, so as to share everything with them (24.6 %). Even lower is the percentage of those who feel the need to share the material goods with the poor (14.7 %) or working to alleviate the poverty of others (13 %).

These figures show the fundamental idea that to be minors means to work for others, especially for the poor, without letting one be "contaminated" by the lives of the poor. This is a solidarity of action and not the sharing in their conditions of life. One does things for the poor, but is not like the poor and among the poor. You work for the little ones but do not become little or 'minor' among them.

And it is also important that the work in favour of the poor happens on at least three levels: there is welfare - service to the poor that we encounter daily; and then there is the promotion of the integral development of the poor; there is also the collaboration with the people of good will to resolve the structural causes of poverty.

The preferential option for the poor that the Church has made "is a theological category before it is cultural, sociological, political, or philosophical. God grants them his "first mercy" (EG 198). In our Order, too, it has been repeated so many times that we are called to make the choice of the poor and the poor are our teachers. But too many times these are echoed as empty words.

The Synod on the new evangelization 2013 reiterated: "The spiritual conversion, the intensity of the love of God and neighbour, the zeal for justice and peace, the evangelical significance of the poor and poverty are required of all" ( *Proposition* 45). And Pope Francis commented: "I

am afraid that these words are only subject to comment without a real practical impact. Nevertheless, I trust in the openness and good disposition of Christians [and of the friars minor], and I ask you to *search together new roads* to welcome this renewed proposal” ( EG 201).

## **B. Toward a renewed closeness to the poor**

*“Only on the basis of a real and sincere closeness can we accompany the poor on their path of liberation...”*<sup>50</sup>

From St. Francis and Pope Francis, we are called to put ourselves next to the poor, to offer them solidarity and spiritual care (cf. EG 200), to make ourselves “minor” with the “minors” that the society marginalizes and keeps far away.” In imitation of our Master - urges the Pontiff - we Christians [and we friars minor] are called upon to look at the miseries of brothers, touching them, accepting these as a responsibility and to work effectively to alleviate these “<sup>51</sup>

Pope Francis often repeats that he wants “a poor Church for the poor” (cf. EG 198). In our General Constitutions the option for the poor is widely proposed and developed. It is first and foremost an imperative for all the friars, because it forms a part of the “discipleship” of Christ who made himself poor for our sake. (cf. GGCC 97 § 1). It means to live among them (cf. GGCC 66 § 1), and living among the poor the friars learn from them (cf. GGCC 93 § 1), observe the events and read the reality from their point of view. (cf. GGCC 97 § 2). Helping the poor and serving them means to work in such a way that they come to a greater awareness of their dignity. (cf. GGCC 97 § 2). It will also mean defending their rights and denouncing everything that offends them. (cf. GGCC 69 § 1-2). This claim of rights has to be made as minors, ensuring carefully against every temptation of power, and with non-violence (cf. GGCC 69 § 1). It also means also avoiding every judgement of the great, the powerful and the rich (cf. GGCC 98 § 1). The option for the poor involves the sharing of goods (cf. 72 § 3) and action for justice and peace (cf. GGCC 96 § 2). As has rightly been written, we are called to the “perfection

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<sup>50</sup> EG 199.

<sup>51</sup> *Message of the Pope for Lent 2014.*

of the holy Gospel”, a perfection that, far from isolating us from poor people of our days, asks of us a level of interdependence and mutual enrichment *with the poor*, which will allow us to be part of the chosen ones of “our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin and his disciples”<sup>52</sup>.

The Pope says, the commitment to solidarity with the poor “consists not only in actions or in welfare programs and assistance: what the Spirit puts in motion is not an excess of activism, but above all an *attention* to the other “considering the other as unique in himself” [S. Thomas Aquinas]” (EG 199).

In the face of the economy of the exclusion, Pope Francis asks for the “social inclusion of the poor” (cf. EG 186-216) so as to deal with the integral development of one who is more fragile and abandoned by the society. A preliminary necessary step is to overcome a certain apathy and indifference, getting away from an individualistic and selfish mentality, to take on a style of life and thought that is more human and more evangelical (cf. EG 207-208).

The Pontiff also exhorts us to come out of the “throw away mentality”, which leads to contempt and abandonment of the weakest, those who are regarded as “useless”.<sup>53</sup> He hopes that “the whole Church may be disposed and concerned to witness to those who live in material, moral and spiritual misery, the message of the gospel which can be summed up as the announcement of the love of a merciful Father ready to embrace every person in Christ. We can do that to the extent that we will be conformed to the image of Christ, who became poor and has enriched us with his poverty”<sup>54</sup> And the same Pope Francis gives us clear witness with that “encyclical of gestures” that he has initiated since the day of his election and is continuing every time he encounters the people, especially the little ones and the sick.

If only we also, the Friars Minor, could speak to the world more with the signs and concrete gestures than with words!

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<sup>52</sup> *Pilgrims and strangers in this world*, cit. op.110 -111.

<sup>53</sup> *Message for the Day of Peace 2014*.

<sup>54</sup> *Message for Lent 2014*.

### **C. Choices and concrete proposals**

What strategies or means do you propose to put in place to ensure the closeness to the poor?

Give concrete choices of solidarity with the poor for the local fraternities, for the provinces and for the whole Order.



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