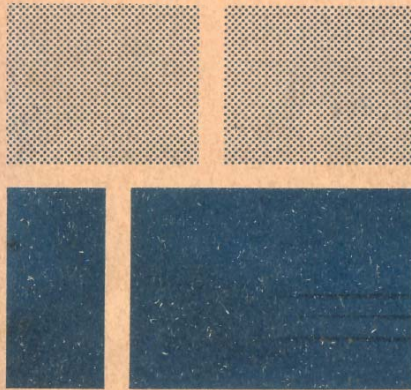


**Building  
a More Just World  
in Solidarity  
with the Poor**





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**Fr. Patrick BRADLEY ss. cc.**

November 20th 1983 Feast  
of Christ the King

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# I. INTRODUCTION

*My dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Fraternal greetings and blessings in the Lord!

The General Chapter of 1982 underlined three currents of renewal which it saw as fundamental in bringing to reality our mission together today, namely:

- I. To enter into an ever greater solidarity with the world of the poor.
- II. To develop among ourselves a fraternal solidarity at all levels: local, provincial, Congregation.
- III. To renew ourselves and our communities in a movement of continuous conversion.

As you know, these orientations of the General Chapter are not primarily the result of ideological discussions. They come right out of the life of our international community. In the preparation of the Chapter, a great effort was made to involve all the brothers. The Chapter members themselves reflected, in a spirit of faith, on concrete situations and on real life experiences. I believe that, as a result, the Congregation is truly responding to a call from God, a call which is profoundly challenging for each one of us.

The General Chapter requested every member and every community of the Congregation to give a real priority to these orientations in their apostolic lives. The General Government has spent many hours reflecting on the Chapter document, and sees its role of leadership in the light of these directions. We seek in every possible way to encourage, animate, support our brothers in entering into these currents of renewal. This is the reason for writing this Circular letter. Obviously, all three orientations are closely linked, and in fact are interdependent, and I hope this will become more apparent when we have published a letter on each of the orientations.

The Chapter norm: *«to build a world of greater justice in solidarity with the poor»* is the first **criterion** for the renewal of the Congregation, and also the first criterion for each of us as we evaluate our religious lives. The General Chapter of 1982 established this as a real priority for the Congregation. I feel it is necessary to share fraternally with the whole community on a subject which the Chapter regarded with such major importance for the future life of our community. Before writing, I consulted with a cross-section of our community in many parts of the world, and I am very grateful to all who responded to my request for help. I have also submitted the text for the approval of the General Council, and I am very grateful (or all the suggestions and comments, which the other members of the Government made. The subject is one of such tremendous magnitude that any treatment cannot hope to be exhaustive. However, I believe that the Government of the community has a serious responsibility at this time, to seek to clarify what is meant by «a clear and prophetic option that expresses itself in preference for and solidarity with the poor. » I hope this letter will be a contribution which will help our community respond to the challenge.

Since the Chapter I have heard some reactions to the priority established for us.

- There are those who find this orientation difficult to understand and they are fearful. In some way, they fear that their present works are being undervalued. They feel that they are being subtly condemned, or at least merely tolerated if they continue to work in fields which they know from experience should be deleted have truly apostolic value.
  - There are those who feel that they will be asked to abandon works they feel are truly worthwhile.
  - There are those who see this orientation, as perhaps having relevance in Latin America, but not in other Provinces.
  - Some feel we need to clarify who we mean by the poor — the economically poor is certainly one group, but what about the morally poor, etc. ?
  - There are some who feel we are succumbing to a political ideology.
  - There are others among us, who, perhaps feel unable to commit themselves to the poor in the way they feel they should because of their years, because of their habits, background, history, etc. There are those who feel that with all this talk about the poor, we will become social workers.
- Many of us feel that we are caught up in an economic system which makes us accomplices in the exploitation of the poor, despite our desires to the contrary. The system itself, so to speak, renders us almost helpless. So there is some confusion and some fear.

Despite the difficulties, there are tremendous signs of hope. So many of our members have expressed their delight with this orientation -they see it as the way to a real renewal and a realization of the Spirit of the Founder among us. At the Chapter itself, *"probably the most significant manifestation of the Spirit of God in our midst came from those of our brothers who have made or who are in the process of making a radical choice for being in greater solidarity with the poor."* (Doc. Gen. Chapter 1982). A great number of our members have taken hope from the Chapter. In fact, they have welcomed with joy, this orientation towards the poor. Somehow, they have recognized the Spirit of God renewing us, precisely, as we begin to identify more and more with God's poor. In many of the Provinces I have visited, I have been really heartened by the eagerness of our members to enter into the Spirit of the Chapter. Already many things are happening in different parts of the world, and real efforts are being made to live out this orientation.

There are of course differences between the Provinces. How can we possibly speak to the Congregation at large? Latin America is so different from the First World. The needs are so different, the Christian responses must be so different. It is indeed a daunting task to write to so dispersed a Congregation on such a theme. A letter such as the present one, on one hand runs the risk of

being merely a list of generalizations which don't touch the concrete situation of people — on the other hand, if it follows a particular viewpoint, it risks being irrelevant for other situations.

However, I believe that clarifications can be made which will show that the 'option for the poor' which our Chapter made, is a truly evangelical option. If it is the Gospel that is being preached to us, then it is good news and we need not be fearful. Perhaps, in the course of this letter we will be able to dissipate some of the fears, take away some of the confusion and give a further stimulus to the work of the Gospel among us.

It is clear that a genuine and motivating concern for justice is indispensable for the development of any authentic contemporary spirituality. Any work for justice must be firmly rooted in the vision of the Gospel, and must spring right from our vocation.

I am addressing this letter directly to our brothers, as a response to the General Chapter of 1982, but also I share these thoughts with our Sisters, for I believe that the aspirations we have, are common to both branches, and are in accordance with the pastoral options of our Sisters' recent General Chapter.

## II. CHURCH TEACHING

Let there be no ambiguity in our minds about the Church's attitude towards the first orientation « *of building a more just world in solidarity with the poor* ».

Concern for the poor and powerless of this world has been constant in the life of the Church. We think of the countless saints, like St Laurence, St Elizabeth, St Vincent de Paul (to name but a few) who consecrated their whole lives to the service of the poor. Perhaps in the past, this concern often took the form of charitable assistance which, today, we would regard as being insufficient — Those who can see things in historical perspective can, however, appreciate the enormous good that was done, even with more limited lights. The realization that, when we speak of the poor, it is a question of satisfying the demands of justice — this realization is one of the more characteristic traits of the contemporary Church. It is, however, worth noting that the Fathers of the Church already, in earlier times, spoke in striking terms about the injustice of the rich who deprived the poor of their rights to share in the fruits of the earth.

Thus, for example, St Cyprian living in the third century, stated: « *Whatever belongs to God, belongs to all by our appropriation of it, nor is anyone kept from his benefits and gifts, nor does anything prevent the whole human race from equally enjoying God's goodness and generosity.* »

St Ambrose of Milan reminds us that all have a right to share in the goods of this earth in the following words: « *When you give to the poor you are really giving what is theirs as all people have a right to the goods of the world.* »

In the fourth century St John Chrysostom reminds Christians that a motive for aiding the poor and their needs lies in the presence of Christ in them: *"Don't neglect your brother in his distress while you decorate His house. Your brother is more truly His temple than any Church building. »*

St Gregory the Great in the seventh century was aware of the relationship which should exist between ourselves and those less well off: *«Feed the man dying of hunger, for if you have not fed him you have killed him. «*

As regards the contemporary Church, already the Vatican Council Fathers declare that *"the joys and the hopes, the grieves and the anxieties of the people of this present age, especially of those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and the hopes, the grieves and the anxieties of the followers of Christ. »* (G. S. 1 See also L. G. N° 23; A. G. N° 20; C. D. N° 13; P. O, N° 20). Already before the Council ever opened Pope John XXIII (on September 1, 1962) had said that the Council would be concerned to make the Church recognizable *«as the Church of all people, but especially the Church of the poor. »*

I would like to underline the way the Church on one hand condemns the injustice present in our world, as a real scandal — even more intolerable when Christians are accomplices in this sinful situation. On the other hand, the Church challenges believers to root out the causes of injustice as a basic demand of Christian love. *«The greater part of the world is in a state of such poverty that it is as if Christ Himself were crying out in the mouths of these poor people to the charity of His disciples. Let us not be guilty of the scandal of having some nations most of whose citizens bear the name of Christian, enjoying an abundance of riches while others lack all the necessities of life and are tortured by hunger, disease and all kinds of misery. Indeed, it is the duty of the whole people of God, under the teaching and example of the bishops, to alleviate the hardships of our times within the limit of its means... »*

(G. S. N° 88)

The poor then for the Council are those *«who lack the necessities of life and are tortured by hunger, disease and every kind of misery. »* The materially poor are singled out (as they are by Old Testament writers and by Jesus in the Gospels) not simply because they are the only «poor». The rich can be morally, emotionally or otherwise deprived. Indeed, as creatures, we are all essentially poor; our existence and all that sustains it are gifts from God. However, the materially poor are the group where the greatest number and variety of needs are concentrated.

*" Wherever men are to be found who are in want of food and drink, of clothing, housing, medicine, work, education, the means necessary for leading a truly human life, wherever there are men rocked by misfortune or illness, men suffering exile or imprisonment, Christian charity should go in search of them, and find them out, comfort them with devoted care, and give them the helps that will relieve their needs. This obligation binds first and foremost the more affluent individuals and nations.*

*«If this exercise of charity is to be above all criticism and seen to be so, one should see in one's neighbor the image of God to which he has been created*

*and Christ the Word to whom is really offered all that is given to the needy. The liberty and the dignity of the person helped must be respected with the greatest sensitivity... The demands of justice must first of all be satisfied: that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity. The cause of evils, and not merely their effects, ought to disappear. The aid contributed should be organized in such a way that beneficiaries are gradually freed from their dependence on others and become self-supporting.»*

*(cf. A. A. N° 8; cf. also practically all of Populorum Progressio)*

The Fathers of the Synod of 1971 came together to ask the question: *What is the mission of the Church in the task of bringing justice to the world?* They wished to record the great injustices they themselves had seen around the world — in the network of oppression which crushes liberty and holds back most people from a better life in equality and brotherhood.

The Fathers of the Synod discerned a hunger for justice stirring in men's hearts the whole world over. They perceived a new consciousness dawning as men woke up from apathy. Men feel within themselves a burning need to liberate themselves to take charge of their destiny. When men make up their minds to change what they can no longer tolerate, new hope has come for all mankind. The Church — the people of God — is called by God to be present among all men preaching Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, joy to the broken-hearted. This Gospel has a power to set men free, not just from sin but from what sin has done to our society. God still reveals Himself through human history. His plan is still unfolding to set us free and save us. It was fulfilled in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. And we are called to preach this message of the Gospel, this Good News of the mission of Christ to liberate mankind. Right at the heart of this preaching lies the work we must do for justice. The Synod Fathers insist that action in favour of justice and liberation belongs essentially to the evangelical mission of the Church. *(cf. Intro, to Synod Doc. )*

It is precisely the Christian's mission as a witness to Christ that imposes a definite commitment to the cause of justice in the world. Christ died that there might be love in the world — and love implies justice. Only a false concept of Christian eschatology has been able to cast doubt on the Church's mission for justice in this world. It is fundamental to believe that the full salvation of man, through the grace of Christ begins already with man's life in this world: salvation, which reaches its fullness in the communal participation of the glory of Christ, begins **here**. So theologically, a radical commitment to justice is part of our salvation message. Without this message of justice, our preaching is based on only part of the Gospel. The Synodal Document on Justice makes it clear that preaching the Gospel *«dictates at the present time that we should dedicate ourselves to the liberation of man, even in his present existence in the world. » (Par. N° 15)*

Pope Paul VI confirmed and developed still further this teaching of the Synod, in his Exhortation *«Evangelii Nuntiandi»* especially in paragraphs 29-38.

Pope John Paul II makes quite clear that *«the Church is firmly committed to this cause of justice for she considers it her mission, her service, a proof of her fidelity*



*to Christ so that she can truly be the 'Church of the poor'»*

*(Laborem Exercens N° 8).*

*In his words «It is necessary that things change. It is necessary that the poor of all classes be able to hope again. The Church in this domain has a prophetic mission, inseparable from its religious mission and the Church demands the liberty to fulfill this mission. »*

*(address to Celam Conference, Mar. '83)*

*With John Paul II we can say, «We direct our pledge to God... at this hour to commit ourselves to work for a more just and human world"»*

*(San Salvador, Mar. 1983)*

### III. THE MESSAGE OF SACRED SCRIPTURE

Our modern world is fouled by the sin of injustice. We are powerless to change this situation by ourselves. So we must be humble and open to hear the voice of God. For He can show us the path we must take in our search for justice in our world.

The Church's teaching is not something which has just arisen in this century, what she is saying is grounded in Sacred Scripture. This document is not intended to be a scriptural treatise yet it is important for all of us to become aware once again of what the Word of God is saying to us.

Who is the God of the Scriptures? In all their proclamations of justice, the Prophets recalled the way God had first revealed himself. He made himself known primarily as the God who freed his oppressed people from bondage in Egypt. The true God of Israel is therefore forever the God who *« saves the poor when they cry and the needy who are helpless »* (Ps. 71). This theme of God as the defender of the poor and the liberator of the oppressed recurs again and again throughout the psalms. Indeed it is like a current threading through the Bible: Isaiah is in no doubt as to what God wants: *«Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me — it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks — to break unjust fetters and undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke, to share your bread with the hungry and shelter the homeless poor, to clothe the man you see to be naked and not turn from your kin?»*

*«If you can do away with the yoke, the clenched fist, the wicked word, if you give your bread to the hungry, and relief to the oppressed. »*

*(Is. 58: 6-10)*

The prophet Amos is just as forceful in denouncing the exploitation of the weak: *« Yahweh says this: For the three crimes, the four crimes, of Israel I have made my decree and will not relent: because they have sold the virtuous man for silver and the poor man for a pair of sandals; because they trample the heads of ordinary people and push the poor out of their path. »*

(Amos 2: 6-7)

Amos is emphatic in his condemnation of this exploitation: *«Listen to this, you who trample on the needy and try to suppress the poor people of the country you who say, 'when will the New Moon be over so that we can sell our corn, and the sabbath, so that we can market our wheat? Then by lowering the bushel, raising the shekel by swindling and tampering with the scales, we can buy up the poor a money, and the needy for a pair of sandals. '»*

(Amos 8: 4-6)

The Old Testament was **promise**: The New Testament is fulfillment.

Christ is the reality of which all the religious history that went before Him was only sign. He could not have been that fulfillment and that reality if He were not the defender of the poor, the protector of the weak, the liberator of the oppressed. These are in fact precisely the terms in which He introduced himself at the beginning of His public mission. In the Gospel of Luke (4: 18-19) Jesus reads the scroll of Isaiah (61: 1 -2): *« The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me, to announce good news to the poor, he has sent me, to proclaim release to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are in prison to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord. »*

Having finished the reading Jesus says: *« Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing » (Luke 4: 21)*. Later on in His ministry when the precursor, John the Baptist, wondered whether Jesus was the promised King, Jesus sent him a list of signs to prove He was *«the one who was to come»* and the last of these signs was: *«Good News is proclaimed to the poor» (Matthew 11: 5)*.

This Good News, announced especially in the Beatitudes means that the injustice suffered by the poor will end with the coming of the Kingdom of God - for God will reign, above all, to the benefit of the poor and powerless, who, though forgotten by men, are always present in the Heart of God. The poor, the hungry, the victimized are the privileged ones in His Kingdom. This basic Christian truth is a special theme of St Luke's Gospel.

Christ did not come to the poor as a stranger, an outsider, as a visitor who passes by to offer sympathy and then departs. Christ identified Himself with the poor, *«being rich, He became poor» (II Cor. 8: 9)*. Like the poor, he suffered humiliation, and became Himself the victim of injustice and oppression. St Paul speaks of how Christ *"emptied Himself to assume the condition of a slave»* and even became *« humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross » (Philippians 2: 7-8)*. St Paul appeals to us to *« be the same in our minds as Christ Jesus was» (Philippians 2: 4-5)*. Clearly, feeling with the poor, identifying and sharing with them, are among the ways in which we come to share the mind of Christ.

First among the poor — those called blessed by Christ — was His own Mother. She had the same mind about the poor that Jesus had. She was one of themselves. This shows in her Magnificat, which has been called the *«Hymn of the Poor»*.

Anyone reading Matthew (25: 31 -46) may realize how Christ identified Himself

with those who are deprived in any way: «*In so far as you did this to these least brothers of mine you did it to me [ (Matthew 25: 40)*. This is the whole thrust of the Christian message. It is vital for all of us, to keep it before our eyes as we live out our apostolic lives.

## IV. THE SIN OF INJUSTICE

### 1. The Christian

Christ's new commandment of love is the way to the true and final liberation which He offered to men. Liberation through Christ's love will not be accomplished merely by raising people from material poverty to material comfort. His liberation is not to be confused with any simply political program. It cannot be confined within the limits of any social reform or revolution (political or cultural). It cannot be attained solely by economic growth. The revolution Christ calls for is far more radical than any social or political revolution ever launched. Christians are radicals who dig down to the roots of evil and try to eradicate them. Christians are revolutionaries whose revolution is peaceful, creative and constructive. It is from sin (of every kind, personal and social), that men need to be liberated — and this liberation from sin Christ offers.

The great sin of our day is, surely, the sin of injustice, which in its turn begets so many forms of poverty. Injustice is not the lot of men, justice is — justice for all. If we live in a society in which some men are exploited and oppressed, or live in conditions unworthy of human dignity, we each have a personal responsibility to do what is in our power to change that society and its unjust structures. This existence of unjust structures is a concrete form of the sin of injustice. The world created by God is given to all men, for the benefit of all men, and all have a right to what is necessary in order to live in dignity.

The dignity of men can only be discovered in all its fullness when we realize the real destiny for which He created every person. That destiny is to become Sons of God in Jesus, thus bringing to full fruit «*the Image and likeness of God*» which constitutes an inseparable dimension of human nature itself.

John Paul II, in «*Redemptor Hominis*» has written beautiful pages on the bond which all men — each one of the thousands of millions of the people on earth — has with Christ by reason of His death, which has redemptive value for all. This is the profound root of his dignity and of the inviolability of his rights (cf. *R. H. 13-17*). All men must fight against everything that offends the dignity of men. All men are called to work for justice.

Through Baptism we receive the Spirit of Jesus. Baptism makes us so one with Christ that God sees in each one of us what He sees in Christ, «*His beloved Son, on whom his whole favour rests.* » Whatever the social bracket to which a man belongs, in reality he is someone in whom Christ lives, someone who bears Christ's image.

Liberation from sin requires, first, personal conversion; and this is a radical, life-long, unending, personal struggle to transform oneself or rather to let

oneself be transformed by the Spirit of Jesus.

This conversion, however, is not a private affair of the individual's spiritual life alone. It means, also, bringing Christ and Christ's love and justice into social relationships, into group behaviour and into political decisions. It is only at this level of reality that we can grasp the full evil that is in all forms of ill treatment of others. Whatever wrong or injustice is inflicted on others, is inflicted on Christ Himself, Whatever is done for others in their weakness and sorrow, in their oppression or need, is done for Christ Himself. Christ has told us in unforgettable words that this is what will determine our eternal state; it is by this that our personal judgment will stand. *«In so far as you did this to one of these least brothers of mine, you did it to me... In so far as you neglected to do this to one of these least brothers of mine, you neglected to do it to me.»*

*(Matthew 25: 40, 45)*

We are never allowed to make a separation between service of God and service of our neighbour. Neither can we ever separate charity from justice. Love that does not begin by respecting the rights of others is a fraud. Charity that does not begin by giving others their just rights is a fake. Supposed love of God which does not include a passion for justice between men is counterfeit religion.

Thus, Baptism itself gives us an obligation to work for justice and love between all men. Baptism is the source of a fundamental commitment for Christians to work for human brotherhood, equality and liberty. There is no such thing as a «second-class Christian»; there are no «lower classes» for the Christian: all are *«one person in Jesus-Christ» (Galatians 3: 28)*.

We are called to see all men, especially the poor, as our brothers, children of a common Father. Truly the Paschal Mystery, in which we participate through our Baptism, could rightly be claimed to be the most revolutionary thing in human history.

Through Baptism, also, we become members of the Church, which continues the mission of Jesus in the world. *«He came, that we might have life, and have it more abundantly.»* This Church, the *«leaven in the mass»* and the *«salt of the earth»* must proclaim justice and denounce injustice. That is her right, but it is also a duty. This is true for the Church, as an institution, but also it is true for all her members.

For every Christian the work for justice has the twofold aspect of conversion and commitment in the world. As regards conversion, the Church itself must always seek to practice the justice we wish for all men. No one can speak about justice who is not first seen to be just Within the Church itself, man's rights must be respected. The Church must ensure respect for the person, freedom of expression, a sharing of her goods — seeking to eliminate any actions, any use of resources, anything in her life-style, that can be a source of injustice. In this process of conversion, the Church, in her members, must seek to be a credible witness. The line may be hard to draw between real needs and what prophetic witness will demand. The Church must live her

life and administer her possessions in such a way that the Gospel can still be preached to the poor. A Church that belongs among the rich and powerful of this world has lost all credibility. The life style of bishops, of priests, of religious, of laity — all need careful scrutiny. How can membership of the Church be a passport to wealth and to power when most of the world is poor and powerless? When millions go hungry, how can we preach self-restraint to others unless our lives reflect our words?

The Church has always done much to alleviate misery and suffering of every kind, and she continues to do so. As mentioned already, the fight for justice goes beyond assistance to the poor. It is a question of attacking the roots of injustice, which produce poverty. For this reason, the Church, which possesses such great moral and spiritual power, and which also has important material and financial resources, cannot remain apart from the great movements of our day — the movements for peace, for racial equality, for the rights of women; the movements **against** the nuclear arms race, the exploitation of the Third World, etc.

## 2. The Religious

Those consecrated to the mission and work of the Church, especially religious, have a particular obligation to work for justice and make their lives and life-style an authentic witness to justice. All of us whose lives take their entire meaning from the service of the Church must listen to the exhortation of Pope Paul VI in *Evangelica Testificatio*: " *How then will the cry of the poor find an echo in our lives ? That cry must, first of all, bar you from whatever would be a compromise with any form of social injustice. It obliges you also to awaken consciences to the drama of misery and to the demands of social justice made by the Gospel and the Church. It leads some of you to join the poor in their situation and to share their bitter cares. Furthermore, it calls many of our institutes to rededicate for the good of the poor some of their works — something which many have already done with generosity. Finally, it enjoins on you a use of goods limited to what is required for the fulfillment of the functions to which you are called. It is necessary that in your daily lives you should give proof, even externally, of authentic poverty. »*

*(Evangelica Testificatio, N° 18)*

This cry of the poor referred to by Pope Paul is a real challenge to the revitalization of religious life. The response to this challenge will not be found in a withdrawal from the world, but rather in inserting ourselves into the world as apostolic religious. Either we enter into the world and history and learn there to listen to God and respond to Him in fidelity, or we must resign ourselves to the fact that little by little our Congregation will be reduced to an institution of the past with no force of attraction, incapable of being the sign that it is called to be. The choice we make will be decisive for the future of our religious life, and for the life of the Congregation.

### **3. SS. CC. Religious**

Our Chapter of 1982, recognizing this reality, states clearly the following:

*«As we reflected on the pastoral work of our brothers, especially in the Third World and in Mission territories, it became evident that commitment to the poor and marginalized people of society constitutes one of the most urgent priorities of our time.*

*"Notwithstanding the many contradictions in our lives and our evident weaknesses, a strong current of renewal in the religious life and the charism of our Congregation is present in some areas. This renewal is most clearly present in those places in which the communities preach the Gospel to the poor, denounce injustice, struggle against oppression, and live in close communion with the concrete situations of a people and their history.*

*« Among our brothers in the Western world, this solidarity with the poor and oppressed takes such forms as struggling for greater justice on the international scene, opposing the institutions of exploitation in the Third World and working to halt the arms race. »*

*« The aspirations of many of our brothers to give priority and a privileged place to a greater solidarity with the poor is supported by the Rule of Life the recent General Chapters, and many Provincial Chapters. This Chapter gives unconditional support to all those who live and work in abandoned areas, and it encourages all the brothers and communities to live their following of Christ by starting from the world of the poor. (We believe, in fact, that the poor are the ones who will assist us to understand and live the Gospel. »*

This understanding of the direction in which the Congregation must move has its antecedents in the *Rule of Life* (cf. R. L N° 89-96). Among the values underlined in these articles are, the need our world has for the witness of evangelical poverty, and how communication with the poor is a sign of the true Church. Religious poverty is presented as the virtue of communion and universal reconciliation, whereas the individualistic pursuit of property and economic security constitute the principal obstacles towards the pursuit of a just society. The Rule of Life reflects the Spirit of our Congregation since the beginning — a Spirit founded on the love of the Sacred Hearts, an eucharistic Spirit.

For the community of our Founders *«devotion to the Sacred Hearts was the means of communion in the great values of the Gospel. It saw the Heart of Christ as the manifestation par excellence of God's merciful and all-powerful love. To respond to the love of God, it was seen that they must unite themselves with, in, and through the Heart of Christ in the attitude of the Servant of Yahweh and enter his saving work. In this way they would make reparation for the sins of mankind. The Heart of Mary was looked upon as inseparable from Christ, not only in its manifestation of the love of God, but also in the carrying out of His redemptive work. »*

(R. L. Portrait of Fr. Coudrin)

In paragraph 568 of Cahiers de Spiritualité, N° 10 we read: *"The community founded by the Good Father was a poor community, in imitation of Christ. Its poverty was real, not only in consequence of difficult circumstances but also because of a desire to serve the poor and to carry on an apostolate without losing its freedom »*. This desire to serve the poor was a clear trait of the Founder's character as is evident in the way he ministered to the poor in the parish of Montbernage in Poitiers, and the fact that the Congregation was committed to *«the education of children from among the poorest»*.

(cf. C. de S. N° 568)

From the beginning the Congregation made reparation for the sins and the injustices of the day even if this was done under the threat of persecution. *« The persecution could not exterminate us, and during fourteen years of government oppression, aided by God's grace, we have been able to hide the existence of our Institute from a perfidious but astute police»*.

(April 14, 1817 — Circular Letter of Founder)

Damien is a shining example of a spirit which was present from the foundation of the Congregation, a spirit which is still alive in our Congregation today, that is, the spirit of the Compassionate Christ who is Good News for the poor.

Inspired by its **consecration to the Sacred Hearts**, the Congregation has always sought to understand the Gospel message, and to live its apostolic life in the context of the Heart of Love. It has always looked with faith on the pierced Heart of Christ, and in an attitude of contemplative prayer, it has found in that Heart the source of its life and of its approach to mission.

Devotion to the Heart of Christ implies entering into the personal mystery of Jesus, in an intimate relationship, entering into His inner life, and into His activity before God and men. Devotion to the Heart of Jesus urges us to proclaim God, as a God of grace. It urges us to look with His Heart on people, in a profound way, and to love them for what they are — not for what they have or what they do.

Thus the General Chapter of 1982 insisted: *«In a world that is more and more depersonalized, and in which there are so many forms of oppression and injustice, our faith in the merciful love of God, incarnate in the Heart of Christ, ought to make us attentive to people as they really are, and especially those oppressed and looked down upon. The struggle for a more just society in our world also finds in our charism a clear and effective support. »*

(G. C. D. 1982, p. 9)

In the Heart of Jesus and in the Heart of Mary, we seek to deepen our concern and compassion for those who suffer. Traditionally we have been consecrated to make reparation for sin, which crucifies the Son of Man and offends the

Father our Creator and Redeemer. We seek to heal the wounds of the Crucified who continues His Passion in the poor of today. Healing the wounds implies not only helping individual poor people but may demand a calling into question of the structures and systems which keep them poor. Devotion to the Sacred Hearts implies a genuine commitment to Christ suffering in the poor of the world.

If we take to heart the cause of the poor, defending their rights, we will suffer as Christ did, « *blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* » (Matthew 5: 10)

**Devotion to the Eucharist** was also a tremendous force in the lives of our Founders, and historically eucharistic spirituality has been characteristic of our Congregation.

The Eucharist unites us to one another and to our God and to the poor and oppressed in the world in a unique way. Let us take a few moments to consider the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is not simply a private devotion or only a personal experience of the presence of God. It is personally strengthening, to be sure, if approached with openness and faith, but it is also outer-directed to the community gathered at each Eucharist and to the whole world. The Eucharist is global vision, for it is *the* Redemptive Act for the whole of humanity. It is not only at the centre of our lives as Christians but also at the centre of the world.

The Eucharist is at the centre of our commitment to social justice. It calls us out of ourselves to be like Jesus who gave Himself in love and in total self-surrender to His friends. The Eucharist is self-gift, an open-ended gift of ourselves, for the many.

Although it is undeniable that eucharistic celebrations build community among those who participate in them, Eucharist also calls us out to the suffering people in our world, oppressed and oppressor alike. We are invited to be the Body of Christ, to be His Body given for the many and His Blood poured out for the many.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist presents us, many times, in its celebrations with reminders of our commitment to justice. At the very beginning we acknowledge before God and one another our complicity in the injustices of our day. We ask for reconciliation with our oppressed brothers and sisters whose hope in a more just world is dependent to some degree on our efforts to achieve justice.

As mentioned in this letter, Scripture, which we listen to at every Eucharist is full of challenges to us to be ready to imitate Jesus in His efforts for the poor, the unfree and the sick. The Jesus we receive in the Eucharist is the same Jesus who is hungering in this world, as has been said: «In the Eucharist we receive Christ hungering in the world. He comes to us, not alone, but with the poor, the oppressed, the starving of the earth. Through Him, they are looking to us for help, for justice, for love expressed in action." To speak of the Bread of Life when millions are hungry will always sound hollow in our ears



unless we know we are doing something to alleviate hunger in the world.

As the *Rule of Life* N° 68 says, our adoration recalls to us that our whole life is under the sign of the Eucharist. The Chapter of 1982 wished «*to emphasize our reparative adoration as a permanent attitude which prolongs the celebration of the Eucharist in our lives* » and thus all that the Eucharist implies as indicated above.

If we fail to recognize and discern Christ in historical situations we are not only doing an injustice to our fellow man but also to the Eucharist — it becomes irrelevant to life, a 'churchy' thing only, which offers no challenge. The Eucharist and prayer should be the power-house of our commitment to social justice. As Jesus Himself said, it is not good enough to cry "*Lord, Lord*» but we must do the will of the Father, Our prayer is complete when it engages our neighbour concretely. The Christian faith demands justice, it is a call to restore the order, repair the damage caused by the consequences of sin, to get rid of the injustices as quickly as possible — «*to set the captives free*».

## **V. WORLD SITUATION**

As SS. CC. Religious, if we are to work towards the building of a more just world, it is important that we have some understanding of the actual situation in which we live.

Our world is inhabited by people of different races, cultures, religions, political, economic and social systems. Our common humanity binds us together as the Human Race, dependent on one another for survival and progress. In fact our survival and development depend on whether we can live and act in cooperation with one another, caring for and sharing the earth we live in.

Divisions threaten and obstruct our development. They occur when people or groups of people try to take more for themselves than is just - more than their just share of wealth, more than their fair share of power. The greatest of these divisions is that which occurs between the Three Worlds. The division between the First and Second World which threatens the survival of humanity, not only with weapons of mass destruction but also by diverting immense wealth and learning into the business of war — away from humanity's urgent need for development. And yet as Paul VI said: «*development is the new name for peace*». The second division is based on wealth. Recently the more industrialized and wealthy nations have come to be known as The North, while the nations of the poorer Third World are concentrated in The South.

The First World is made up of Western Europe, North America, Australia and Japan. This is the industrialized and developed world where most of the people have the highest material standard of living in the world. The First World has less than 20 per cent of the world's population and yet controls 80 per cent of the world's trade and investment and almost 100 per cent of its research. The Third World is made up of most of Asia, all of Africa (except South Africa), Central and South America and the Caribbean. The Third World

has nearly 75 per cent of the world's population, it controls less than 15 per cent of the wealth. The majority of its people live in poverty and it is estimated that by the year 2, 000 four out of every five people in the world will live there. Deprived of the most basic needs of life — adequate food, water, shelter — 10, 000 people, over half of them children, die each day in the Third World of hunger or related diseases. Yet the reality of the situation is that the world produces enough food to feed everyone. The United States tells us that to feed everyone adequately the world needs to provide the equivalent of 500 lbs. of grain per person and yet the amount of grain marketed in the world each year is 1300 million tons. — enough to provide the necessary 500 lbs. of grain for over 6 billion people or one-and-a-half times the present world population. FAO/ UNESCO soil maps conclude that the world could sustain the production of over 32 billion tons of grain each year, i. e., 25 times as much as at present.

#### NORTH:

Has 1/4 of the world's people

4/5 of the world's income 90% of  
manufacturing industry

85% of the world's arms

98% of the world's research and development

87% of the world's energy consumption

People can expect to live, in average to over 70. Most people eat well and go through secondary school. The North dominates the international economic system and the world's institutions of trade and finances.

SOUTH: Has 3/4 of the world's people

1/5 of the world's income 1/4 of children die before  
they reach the age of five.

Over 1/3 of the people suffer malnutrition.

Only about 1/2 of the people receive any schooling at all.

30% of the South's people, about 800 million,  
cannot meet their basic needs.

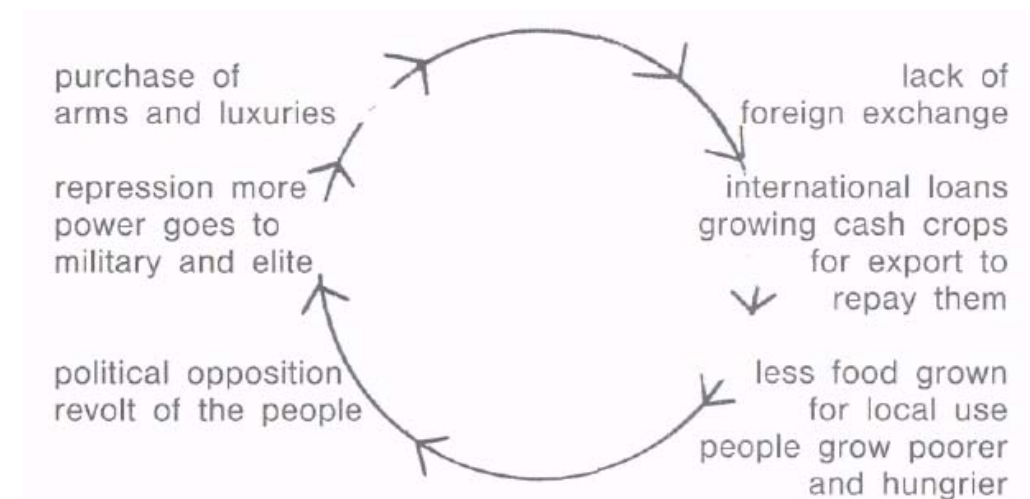
One of the major reasons for the poverty in the Third World lies in the unfair dealings in world trade. The profits which accrue from Third World exports go to the First World. 70 per cent of world imports of fuel and minerals come from countries of the Third World. The EEC and the USA get all their coffee, cocoa, tea, bananas, hard fibres, rubber, jute and wood products from this same source as well as 60 per cent of all world exports of agricultural and mineral commodities (other than oil). The Third World should be earning a lot of money from all these but tariffs and quotas, inflation, and synthetics all conspire to deprive it of the benefits.

The real problem is one of power as well as wealth. The rich nations are powerful and do not wish to give away any of their power. They fear that the standard of living of their own people would fall if they did so, so they give aid. That way they can keep control of things, and will not change the balance of power in the world. Power can only be shared when the world's economic and trading system is changed to give the developing countries equal chances.

Frequently, the existence of poverty points to a prevailing injustice. A built-in injustice in the very system itself. But this poverty is part of a vicious circle which comprises the purchase of arms and luxuries leading to lack of foreign exchange, which necessitates international loans, which demands cash crops for export to repay them. This means less food grown for local use, people grow poorer and hungrier which leads to political opposition and revolt and this in turn leads to repression and more power in the military and the elite.

**VICIOUS CIRCLE:**

**POVERTY - REPRESSION - MILITARISATION**



Poverty is not just a lack of necessities for life but is a result of a system which leaves a considerable number of people deprived of power, without a voice, without even the basic necessities of life.

**VI. ACTUAL STATE OF THE CONGREGATION**

At this point we should note certain realities about our Congregation which help us understand better the resources we bring to the task of building a more just society in solidarity with the poor.

The geographical picture: Two-thirds of the Congregation lives in the North, in Europe and in the English-speaking world. Only some 360 live in Latin America and other poor areas.

Major **activities** of the Congregation: The vast majority of our members are in parishes and schools that largely care for those who are not poor.

Although commitments to the poor are on the increase in the Community, these are personal now, rather than commitments from the Provinces. But there are signs of change in this.

**Age factors:** Our average age is 52, with approximately 700 over 50 years of age. This means that the formation of many of our members is more than thirty years old: a formation that had a spiritual moralistic bias focussing on «My eternal salvation ». Our social awareness was not well developed. One of the results of our formation was that we were taught to be rather passive with regard to social problems, i. e., not to take issue with, not to get involved in social or political matters.

Another inheritance from our formation is that we were taught to operate as religious only within the patronage and leadership of the institutional Church. Finally, our formation taught us not to take sides. We were left with the paralysis of wanting to help the poor and a simultaneous unwillingness to offend the rich.

There is a growing awareness of misery in the world and a readiness to confront it with money, time and personal effort. But it is still largely a personal willingness rather than an institutional commitment by Provinces.

There is a growing sense of justice, that finds expression in wanting to care for the poor. Some of our communities have undertaken works precisely to be in solidarity with the poor.

The Congregation is getting better in its awareness of the situation and in its knowledge of the problem — the Chapter of '82 is a good indicator of this fact. But it tends to be intellectual, conceptual knowledge: we don't yet know viscerally how to deal with the question. There is a specific challenge to us as an international community to confront the question in our own realities, and to become a specific international witness and sign of the possibility of a more just society.

## VII. SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Given the world situation and the resources at the disposal of our Congregation, let us try to read the *"Signs of the times in the light of the Gospel so that the world will be transformed."* »

As we read these «Signs of The Times in the light of the Gospel», we can ask ourselves the questions: 'What is the Lord saying to us?' ' How are we reading these signs in order to spot the opportunities for evangelization' ?

People of many nations and religious who have shown concern for the direction our world is taking, and all who reflect on these characteristics, would agree that the general objectives in world reform are:

- I. The need to share more equitably;
- II. The need to live more simply;

III. The need to find happiness, primarily in human spiritual values, especially freedom, equality, brotherhood, respect for rights and for human dignity.

It is precisely here that the challenge presented to us touches the core of our religious life. Religion can help in world reform, by having a conviction of these values, by promoting them in their various activities and by giving an example of them in their life-style.

As we analyze the world of today we do so recognizing that it is essential for us to examine our own motivation and to be willing to be converted by what we see and experience. The attitude we bring to our analysis and reflection of the situation in the world today, needs to be one of openness and willingness to learn. After all God is working in our world. He is speaking to us through this world. And He is asking us to listen and be converted.

During his visit to the United States in 1979, Pope John Paul II said: *« You will not allow yourselves to be intimidated or discouraged by oversimplified explanations, which are more ideological than scientific explanations which try to account for a complex evil by some single cause. But neither will you recoil before the reforms — even profound ones — of attitudes and structures that may prove necessary in order to recreate over and over again the conditions needed by the disadvantaged if they are to have a fresh chance in the hard struggle of life. »*

The Pope was repeating the ideas of two great Church people, Cardinal Cardijn and Pope Paul VI. The former urged his Young Christian Workers to *« see/judge/act »*, that is, the stress was not on what was obviously visible but the reason why a particular social situation existed. Pope Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens* puts it even more clearly:

*«/is up to Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and to draw principles of reflection, norms of judgment, and directives of action from the social teaching of the Church. »*

Social analysis is a tool to be used by Christians enabling them to be better equipped in their option for the poor. Christians are inundated with information each day: the plight of the poor in their own countries and other countries is expressed graphically on T. V., radio and in the press. Christians are not sufficiently aware of the reasons for the plight of the poor, the causes of injustice and the seeming inability of man to change the situation.

The originality of Cardinal Cardijn lay in the emphasis on looking for the causes of social situations. Implied here is to stress what is first of all seen or experienced and then to look for the root cause of this perceived reality. The lived experience of people is the primary datum of any analysis but especially in the context of the realities of poverty, injustice and peace. But the lived experience is not enough, life is more complex. Reality has a history. Reality is not made up of persons, it is comprised of persons in relationships which are economical, political and cultural.

Wherever we are, as a Congregation, there exists poverty, and injustice. For some of us these realities are not within the parameters of our apostolate, for others they are part and parcel of our everyday lives. For all of us, however, they are challenges calling for a response in each of us. For those of us in the First World the result of social analysis should be to highlight the causes of poverty and injustice in our own countries and become conscious of the relationship between the plight of the Third World and conditions in the First World. For many in the Third World this analysis has been accomplished already and action is taking place. In South America the documents of Medellin and Puebla have given impetus to social analysis and subsequent pastoral and apostolic action.

Pope Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens* has stressed that all social analysis is geared to action in the light of the Gospel. He talks of the four-fold process whereby we reflect on our experience and come to decisions and action as a result of that reflection.

This presents a challenge to the religious of the world today. That challenge requires a response in courage and hope. We can apply this process in our own community, in our Provinces, in our Congregation. But we need to do it together. Our world is too big and the problems too complex to *-go it alone"* any longer. Religious are showing that they are among the most creative pioneering groups. There is no part of the Congregation which does not have someone at the local level pioneering an initiative that promises to radically change local society.

While the sum total of these initiatives have not yet come together, at least the blades of grass have come to the surface. While we each have our own gifts as individuals, it is quite evident that the Lord is calling us to share those gifts in the service of His people. We need to reflect in a spirit of faith on the world we live in and then **to plan together** in order to fully accept the opportunities which are provided for us in the future. We can do so with confidence for *«He whose power is at work in us is powerful enough and more than powerful enough to accomplish all our hopes and dreams. »*

## VIII. NEED FOR A COMMUNITARIAN APPROACH

Factually and briefly above, we have described the actual situation in the world. Obviously a much more detailed, more concrete, more particularized analysis is necessary in every one of our communities, be they in the First or Third Worlds. It is clear that each area must make its own analysis. A social analysis of the First World must begin in that world. An analysis made in Latin America for Latin America cannot be substituted for a study of the actual situation in the First World, however related the problems may be.

Communal life, its various expressions and forms, is in deep and continuing trouble in the First World. Our history of the 20th century has been one of a fairly conscious flight from life together. Community is becoming harder and harder for ordinary people to find. There is no longer clearly visible in our urbanized society a significant capacity to provide community as a sustained

experience. Affluence and the pursuit of affluence are creating lifestyles and societies calculated to protect us from contact with each other. In fact, privacy may be the major product affluence buys.

In Latin America the most significant single social reality confronting a Church in mission is without doubt the concentration of massive wealth and power in the hands of the few while the great mass of the people live lives of poverty and powerlessness, of injustice and oppression.

The Latin American Episcopate at Medellin and Puebla rejected the idea that the Church can have a purely religious role, unconnected with social and political developments. This idea was inevitably a fiction, and in Latin America it obscured the Church's close links with the centres of economic and political power. Now with the renewal of Church life in Latin America, the Church agrees that the structures of this power may themselves be an obstacle to the liberating message of the Gospel. It is increasingly saying that the only authentic Christian witness is one made from the position of the poor and in solidarity with them.

In the South Pacific, in Africa and in India, our missionaries are confronted with the same problems of poverty and injustice in varying degrees. Indeed in some of these areas of the world the poverty is so great that people literally die of hunger every day. More and more the prophetic voice of the Church is being heard, as she engages herself in the work of human development so closely linked to evangelization (*cf. E. N. N° 31*).

The Church has begun to move away from the previous links with political and economic power, and to accept that it must pass a Christian judgment on social and economic structures. Thus, it has been ready to protest at the increasing impoverishment of much of the population.

*"It is our Christian responsibility to promote in every way non-violent means to re-establish justice in social, political and economic relations".*  
(Puebla, N° 533)

In the First World poverty and injustice are plentiful — they multiply alarmingly — but perhaps the single most pervasive and serious directly social phenomenon is the erosion and disintegration of community, the loss of human solidarity. Injustice, poverty, alienation and powerlessness are attendant ills. The pursuit of affluence, of individual economic mobility, all add inevitably to oppression and injustice in our world and in its relations to the rest of the world but the most immediate general effect is communal disintegration.

The political consequences are major. Political scientists have known for a long time that community in all its forms plays a key role in the distribution of power, standing between the individual and the power of the state. It is no accident that the totalitarian state, be it of the right or of the left, does not favour intermediary communities between the individual and the state.

History proceeds from the actions of individuals but especially from organized

groups of all sorts — political, cultural, financial, religious, unions, etc., etc. These actions in turn create structures and systems which then condition and limit persons and groups. We could make this a more just world, a more peaceful world, a more communal world - we just don't want to! This perception of communal responsibility must become a constitutive element of the operative faith of the local Christian community.

The bishops of Appalachia took note of this in their remarkable pastoral of a few years ago: « *This power overwhelms the good intentions of good people... We know that there are many sincere business people, zealous reporters, truthful teachers, honest law enforcement officers, dedicated public officials, hard-working lawyers and legislators who try to do a good job. But we know, too, that the way things are set up, it's hard for good people to do a good job.* » As this awareness grows more widespread and becomes sharper, our realization is deepening that a faith which has no questions about the established order, which seeks only a moralistic reform of that order, which is in short -apolitical » is at best naive and at worst a hindrance to authentic Christian life. We are realizing that such a faith cannot — must not — survive into the future as a credible form of Christian life.

The Christian must be a subject of history. He can be fully such in our society, only as a committed member of a community which is itself "in mission". This community will have the means of enabling the members to together locate themselves in an historical context. They will be able to make a critical evaluation of their society including their own Christian community and its role in society.

In short it will be a community with a capacity to discern, to choose and to act as a community so that what its members know and believe is linked to a real transformation of themselves and their world. This involves moving from a community where everything is ordered to the salvation of the individual to a community which is a sign of a different society, a sign of what can be expected when human relations are defined in terms of communication, a society based on sharing more than on possession, on being more than on having.

Is this possible? Is such a transforming community a realistic, a legitimate hope and goal? I believe that we have many traditions available to us which say it is. We have a history which shows how individuals and especially groups of individuals, not merely did good things, but through an inspired use of frequently limited resources, coupled with a prophetic insight of faith acted so as to anticipate history and to radically transform their society and its structures and institutions. I have no doubt, for example, that a social history of 18th and 19th century Europe will show that that society, as it was then constituted, required and secured an illiterate poor to maintain itself as it existed. When groups of Christian men and women decided to educate the poor, and did it, they did much more than perform an immediate work of mercy — they were being socially subversive. They were radicals, authentic and powerfully effective agents of social transformation.

But there are problems, of course. The Council officially abandoned a monolithic concept of the Church as a pyramidal institution with pyramidal



life processes and forms. It envisioned a radically changed Church, a community which indeed remained hierarchical but in which the real axis of the Church is no longer the hierarchy but rather the community, the people of God. That vision has not been realized. *Communion* as a principle of Church life and organization remains until now a secondary consideration. The post-Vatican II Church continues to understand and organize herself in hierarchical terms. And hierarchical here must include priests. The centrality of the clergy is a key element of the predominantly hierarchical Church.

There are moreover powerful and steadily persistent efforts at work in the Church to ensure that the life processes peculiar to a pyramidal institution remain the operative ones. This is a tragedy. It is not simply a question of such processes being uncongenial or unpleasant for more democratic modern tastes. The truth is that the sort of community centred on the life and concerns of the people can be an agent of transformation. The hierarchically ordered Church is often preoccupied with her own concerns — these are certainly not the concerns of the people. The translation of communion into the primary principle of our life and organization, especially in the local or parish community is vital if the Church in our society is to fulfill her mission.

Thus we believe that the Church, and the Congregation in it, is called as never before, to manifest that **communion** is possible, to say something about the future of the world and to anticipate courageously, in some way, this future in its own life and mission. We must show experientially, with joy and deep conviction, that community in Christ is Good News for the modern world. Thus it is imperative that everywhere in the Congregation this aspect of our life be deepened not only as a value in se but as an instrument of evangelization. If we expect to evangelize the people of God we must be evangelized ourselves as *"the vigor of evangelization shall remain very feeble, if those who announce the Gospel are divided between themselves by so many sorts of ruptures"* (E. N. N° 77).

*« Brotherly unity shows that Christ has come, and from it results great apostolic influence" (P. O. N° 15).*

*«In a Church which must be a witness and an instrument of brotherhood among people, we should be concerned about creating Christian communities that are open, simple, fraternal and in solidarity, » (General Chapter 1982).*

A little later in this letter, we suggest some ways in which we can develop a communitarian approach in our various ministries.

## IX. PARTICULAR ISSUES

The reflections which follow are, in no way, meant to be a detailed and exhaustive study of the topics considered. Rather, I wish to highlight some points for further reflection and study in our communities. Of the many subjects arousing universal concern today, I chose the following:

- A. *EDUCATION FOR JUSTICE* *because of the many members*
- B. *PARISH AND OTHER MINISTRIES* *of the community engaged in these activities.*
- C. *POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT AND RELIGIOUS AND EVANGELIZATION.* *because of the close relationship between human advancement and evangelization.*
- D. *CONSUMERISM AND POVERTY* *In writing on justice, I wished in a special way to highlight the plight of the poor.*
- E. *UNEMPLOYMENT* *as it is one of the great social evils of our day.*
- F. *THE ROLE OF WOMEN* *because of the particular*
- G. *RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FIRST AND THIRD WORLD* *importance of these issues for the building of a more just*
- H. *PEACE* *World'*

### **A. Education for justice**

Christian education means teaching people how to base the whole of their lives on the Gospel. But all too often, education simply teaches them how to get on in the world. Much of the human race has been steeped in that mentality which glories in possessions. Schools and the mass media tend to be so much taken up with the established order of things that all they manage to produce is a carbon-copy person whom that order wants, produced in its own image — a far cry from the 'new man' of the Gospel.

Education means preparing people for a way of life that is genuinely and utterly human. It is meant to awaken a critical sense towards society, towards the way people live and the values they adopt. Education should prepare us to abandon all these values if they fail to favour justice for all. In developing countries the main aim of education should be to awaken people's consciousness. People should become aware of their situation. They should experience a call to change things for the better, through and through. Such awakening has started — and with it has begun a total transformation of the world.

Education is meant to make us more human. It is meant to help us resist manipulation by mass media or by political powers. It is meant to help us to take control to our own destinies — to create communities which are genuinely human.

Education does not stop. It is meant for anyone of any age. But it must be practical. It works by getting people involved in action, in having a share in what is going on, and in direct contact with injustices.

*"The content of this education necessarily involves respect for the person and for his dignity. Since it is world justice which is in question here, the unity of the human family within which, according to God's plan, a human being is born must first of all be seriously affirmed. Christians find a sign of this solidarity in the fact that all human beings are destined to become in Christ sharers in the divine nature. »*

*(Justice in The World, p. 17)*

Because so many of our members are involved in the apostolate of education we seriously ask ourselves: What is the aim of our educational system ? What is the aim of the schools that so many of our religious are running? Is it to strengthen the motivation of so many people who prize economic gain and political power? There is a deep need to analyse what is happening in this field and what contribution we religious can make, in order to prepare young men and women to live more simply, to share more equitably and to put their trust in human and spiritual values. As we look at the educational systems in our Provinces today, perhaps we should ask ourselves: what **type of presence** do we wish to have in our schools? How can we encourage our lay teachers to exercise Christian leadership in our schools? What kind of evangelical animation can we provide for our students? What kind of values are we transmitting to our young people?

In the long-term there will be new opportunities: education for a different world will be impelled to become a different education. This will involve:

- education for initiative not conformity, for freedom and responsibility and solidarity;
- education will be encouraged to envisage less stereotyped careers for its students;
- education will be for a world seeking a new purpose.

In the past through our schools and colleges we responded to the needs of the times. In many cases the poor and needy whom we served are not today's poor. The needs of the group we served have altered. In our service to these groups, to work in the same institutions and to perform the same types of ministries as in an earlier period would not be to serve the same needs. The world has changed, the Church has changed, SS. CC. must change to meet today's challenges. Those in this apostolate must ask themselves if we/they are effectively addressing the issue of Social Justice.

*«It must never be forgotten that the purpose of instruction at school is education, that is, the development of man from within, freeing him for that conditioning which would prevent him from becoming a fully integrated human being. The school is an institution where young people gradually learn to open themselves up to life as it is, and to create in themselves a definite attitude to life as it should be. « Since it is motivated by the Christian ideal, the Catholic School is particularly sensitive to the call from every part of the world for a more just society, and it tries to make its own contribution towards it. »*

*(Vatican Sacred Congregation for Cath. Ed.: The Cath. Sch. )*

## **B. Parishes and other ministries**

The Church is too clerical, the «people of God» of Vatican II, in many places, is still only an idea on paper. In all our ministries we need to address the injustice which flows from the lack of lay participation in the life of the Church, especially in the decision-making processes that affect the lives of the people.

The formation **of lay leaders** is a vital task at every level of the Church's life and it is especially so at the level of parish and local community. The formation of leaders and ministers who create and develop local Christian communities is essential, that is, — laity, religious, priests — ministers with new visions and new skills of listening and interacting; skills for communal consciousness and participation; skills for discerning, decision and action.

As this occurs there should gradually arise *« groups which come together within the Church so that they may be closely united with her and contribute to her development. These groups will be nurseries of evangelization and will be of great service to larger communities, especially to individual churches and indeed the universal Church» (cf. E. N. N° 57).*

The communities of which we speak do not live in the abstract but in the midst of the world where poverty and injustice abound. *«The Church puts herself, by her very nature, in the service of man, his advancement, his development, his rights, his progress according to the liberating anthropology of the Gospel message which puts at the centre of her deepest concern any form of slavery and oppression. God wants a free man, aware of his own spiritual dignity, and responsible for the good of all» (John Paul II, L'Osservatore Romano, English Edition, July 30, 1979, N° 31, p. 8).* In our ministries we seek to develop evangelizing groups of laity with an option for the poor. We seek also to help the poor to organize themselves as we live and work among them, in order that they may obtain justice.

In this context all should heed the word of John Paul II as he addressed the Indians in the highland city of Quetzaltenango in Guatemala on March 8, 1983: *« No one should pretend ever again to confuse evangelization with subversion, to achieve peace there is nothing better than to return dignity to those that suffer injustice, scorn and misery... »* He went on to say that the Church must, *« raise its voice of condemnation when human rights are violated. »*

On the same occasion the Holy Father spoke about the right to organize, saying that different ethnic groups should cultivate their solidarity, "*Help one another, organize associations for the defense of your rights and the defense of your projects.* »

If I have insisted on concerns which should be common to all Christians in their approach to ministry today — this is simply because it is necessary for us also to keep these priorities in mind. I would like however also to recall what the General Chapter of 1982 said to us in particular, namely: « *The Chapter gives unconditional support to all who live and work in abandoned areas, and it encourages all the brothers and communities to live their following of Christ by starting from the world of the poor*» (*Gen. Chap. Doc. p. 4*). These guidelines will have ramifications for us as we examine both the choice and form of ministry in our Provinces.

### **C. Political involvement and the religious**

It is not our job to get directly involved in politics, but we should be offering prophetic leadership. Our task is to develop attitudes, to begin the dialogue, to activate the consciences of those we lead, to challenge people to build a just society. We are the vanguard of the Church. We must align ourselves with and understand the people who have no power. We must listen to the voice of the oppressed. There is no substitute for direct acquaintance with the oppressed and their condition.

Generally religious have shown an awareness that their involvement in human development is a service of the Gospel and not a preferential choice of ideologies or political parties. They also realize that they run the risk of losing their identity as religious by any involvement in politics. But some guiding principles in harmony with the teaching of the Church can throw light on this subject which in itself is sometimes a matter of heated debate.

Politics in the broadest sense can be understood as the organization of the whole life of society. It is therefore the duty of all citizens to participate in it actively and responsibly. Looked at in this way, our role as religious is profoundly meaningful, in its encouragement of cultural and social changes which contribute to human advancement.

In its document on *The Ministerial Priesthood*, the 1971 Synod laid down guidelines on this particular point and these are still valid today (*cf. Part II, § 2: Secular and Political Activities*).

Is it not by being « *well-versed*» in this matter of the Gospel that we religious can have a more decisive and profound influence than we would by being committed to a party which limits our horizons, deprives us of part of our freedom to reflect, separates us from others and prevents us from being an active element of exchange and cohesion? This means that apart from exceptional cases when religious, with the required authorization, have to fill a gap, we will refrain from joining any political faction.

Like every other citizen, we naturally keep the right to make our own political options, but we ought not to present them as being the only legitimate choice

for a Christian; if we did, we might be a cause of division among the faithful.

Although we should not opt for political militancy, we should remember that we can and, at least in some cases, should promote political values in other ways, e. g., by alerting Christians and by our teaching and witnessing.

#### **D. Consumerism - Poverty**

*« The greatest service that religious can offer to mankind today is to give irrefutable witness against consumerism by a life that is frugal, offering to the world in our own persons that interpretation of the Gospel, authentic and liberating, for which it is longing. Frugality, furthermore, is that which the world must adopt if it wants to survive, and it will have to do this in one of two ways: either by the force of a totalitarian state of whatever stripe... or by the way of evangelical love... This frugality, from which no religious can consider himself or herself dispensed, will in many cases unfortunately be the only level of solidarity with the poor which is possible. But it alone is not enough, for if the force of our testimony as religious is to be realty, even irresistibly effective, then many other religious, impelled by the Spirit, will have to live lives of even closer solidarity with the poor, working directly among them and for them in pastoral, auxiliary or social works. The world needs the kind of obvious and unarguable witness that shakes it forcefully, indeed shocks it, forcing it to open its eyes to the reality of its problem and of the only solution. Declaration and words, lightly tossed off, will not achieve this. The world needs words of witness so clear and striking that it will be impossible to ignore them. » (Fr. Arrupe: Third Inter-American Conference of Religious, Montreal 1977)*

The consumerism of which Fr. Arrupe speaks de facto leaves millions and millions living in dire poverty. This is not merely a Third World problem but leaves vast numbers of people exploited in the First World also.

The reality is that in our world there exist millions of powerless people. Let us be clear — when we speak of the poor we speak of those without power — the materially poor, those without food, shelter, work, those who have been deprived of the rights due to their dignity as human beings.

Pope Paul VI in *Evangelica Testificatio* relates our vow of poverty not only to personal asceticism or mortification, but also to social service and to social justice.

We live our religious vow of poverty, insofar as we burn with indignation for the oppressed... *«those who are not on the side of the oppressed are on the side of the oppressor. » (Pope Paul VI)*. We are poor insofar as we preach the Gospel of Social Justice to the complacent; insofar as service to those in serious need is a top priority.

*« The cry of the poor was never more insistent than it is today. You hear it from individuals in dire need and from groups who endure a common misery. In a world experiencing the full spate of growth, the continued existence of poverty-stricken masses and individuals constitutes a pressing call for 'a change of heart and mind'. It concerns you particularly, since you follow Christ especially*

*in the kenosis of His earthly existence. We are well aware that this call is making such an impact on you that some feel themselves urged at times to take violent action. But as disciples of Christ, you cannot follow any other way than His own. And His is not, as you know, a political zeal, an attitude of the temporal order. It is a call to a conversion of hearts, to a freedom from all temporal encumbrances. It is a call to love. »*

*(Evangelica Testificatio, N° 17)*

This love challenges all of us to live **for the poor**. We must avoid an univocal approach to the question. There are many ways of being for the poor. It could be, for example, that a university professor is a most effective agent of social change, even though his ministry does not enable him to work directly with the poor.

All our apostolates have their social justice dimensions. The same is true of our way of life, our attitudes towards employees, our interest in the social and political life of the countries in which we live. We must be sensitive as to how our way of life and our apostolates affect, directly or indirectly, the poor and oppressed. We must be very much on our guard against any unwitting collusion with unjust structures. At the same time there must be an urgency in our searching for new ways to promote social justice in our apostolates. The most effective way of carrying this to fruition would seem to be by making local communities and individual religious more conscious of their obligation. At the same time direction and aid must be offered from the provincial and general levels.

We must also examine the deployment of our personnel. As indicated above the great majority of our members minister in the First World and to the middle-classes. These latter need to be served — they too have problems but they are problems of the middle-class. Our apostolic priorities are in favour of those who are materially poor, who are defenseless or weak in the face of injustice.

Some of our members are already working directly **with the poor**, a much smaller number are living **among and as the poor** insofar as this is possible. We welcome these developing ministries as real signs in our Congregation of a growing concern for the poor. What is important is that all of us are people who are willing to stand with the poor and oppressed, directly or indirectly, responding in a real way to their needs. This is the first criterion for every Sacred Hearts religious today. We have as our mission that of Jesus Himself, *«to announce Good News to the poor. »*

In practice some of what is expressed above will demand very concrete actions indeed, for example:

- being willing to investigate the existence of poverty around us;
- educating those with whom we work by example, e. g. by not staffing schools **only** for the rich, having parishes where only the rich live with no education for justice programs in them;

- ensuring that in formation, on-going formation and in all our apostolates education for justice is a priority;
- daring to speak out on the injustice and immorality of superfluity when poverty co-exists with it;
- being willing to question whether people have a right to 50, 000 dollars per annum if other people are starving or without housing;
- being seen to be for the poor, the voice of the oppressed and not subservient to any establishment be it political, ecclesiastical or economic;
- by listening to what is being said, even by those who are aggressive in their protests, for sometimes a riot is a last cry for help!
- by involving people in their own development, awakening and deepening their consciousness of oppressive structures and laboring to change these structures.

This is not an exhaustive list but merely suggests some questions we might ask about the radicality of our commitment to build a more just world in solidarity with the poor.

Finally, on a congregational level, we have serious questions to ask with regard to our presence in the world. If the Gospel is meant for all we must focus the greatest attention where the greatest needs exist. The largest concentration of needs are those of the materially poor, they also happen to be the vast majority of the human family. In our planning for the future this consideration must be of major importance.

### **E. Unemployment**

Unemployment is one of the great social evils of our time. It is easy to think of statistics but think of those people individually — a parent out of work effects more than the money coming into a home. It effects the whole morale, vision and outlook. And it gives little sense of hope. We have never had to stand in a welfare queue. We have never known the humiliation of being without work. Try to think of the people you know who are unemployed. It is only when we realize what they experience, the frustration, the humiliation, the loss of self-worth, only then will we be motivated to work for the necessary social change.

In "*Laborem exercens*» Pope John Paul stresses that in the area of work and employment our first priority must be to underline the dignity of the human person. Work contributes to that dignity. Anything which denies the opportunity to work or devalues it, diminishes human dignity. Unemployment leading to inactivity and purposelessness, is an evil which can never be an option for the human person. The unemployed are the new oppressed in society. As Christians we are called to free them.



We recognize that society has failed the unemployed. We want to stand with them in their struggle. We sense the anxiety and anger they feel. We refuse to accept that unemployed status should be an inevitable and permanent feature of our world. We are especially conscious of the young people whose immense potential may remain unrealized. We recognize that it is the responsibility of all sections of society to ensure that they are not denied fulfillment in life that work provides.

The primary goal of the State is the common good of its citizens. « *Through work people achieve fulfillment as human beings and become more human* » (John Paul II). It is a responsibility of the State to provide work for its citizens. In a time of recession, when the first effect of the economic situation is unemployment, the first priority of the policies of the State should be to arrive as soon as possible at full employment. This is vital in order to ensure that the effects do not weigh most heavily on the most vulnerable members of society. As long as the recession lasts, the State should give some security to the unemployed by means of some work which will help them maintain a sense of their personal dignity and social value. An unemployed person should not be forced to remain idle. Economic considerations alone should not determine state policies. We should strongly advocate policies whereby our governments support industries, agriculture and small co-operatives, and assist privately owned companies primarily in terms of the human and social benefits of work and not in terms of monetary profit.

We must support all those who are working towards these objectives. Thus, for example, one of the high points of the last European Continental Conference was the meeting which some of the participants had with workers in Belgium who were threatened with loss of their jobs. These workers had formed a cooperative to manage a factory (a marble works) which, otherwise, would have been obliged to close down. Initiatives such as this one, at least show that the fight against unemployment is not something which concerns only the State or big business or the trade unions.

The concern of a Christian is not limited to caring for the victims of injustice, but also to analysing the causes of such suffering, and confronting the attitudes and values which oppose necessary changes. Our Christian communities should also concern themselves with providing the social and cultural activities and recreational amenities for the unemployed, and especially for jobless youth. We must also devote special pastoral attention to those out of work and their families.

## **F. Role of women**

It is important for us to promote the participation of women as equal partners in cultural, socio-economic, and political life. Women's equal dignity and equally important role in family, society and Church life must be acknowledged, not by mere words, but by new and better informed attitudes and new structures.

According to a paper presented at the 1980 U. N. Conference on Women, although females account for half the world's population, they put in two-thirds of the world's working hours, receive only one-tenth of world income and own only one hundredth of its property.

I do not think that there is in the Church, a realistic consciousness about the depth and breath of this problem and its injustice, not only to women but to the world to which they could contribute so much. The Church herself can appear to the world as model or scandal by the way she herself addresses various questions such as the role of women. The Church must make sure that her own house is in order, so that her word to the modern world will be backed up by her own witness.

I am referring here to the many roles and functions that women can and should play in the life of the Church. Great harm is done to women, and to the Church by refusing decision-making power to one half of the human race.

Women are not really sufficiently consulted on social and ethical problems of church and society even when they are most vitally concerned and most knowledgeable. Our own Congregation, because of its uniqueness as a congregation of brothers and sisters, has I believe a prophetic role in this regard. This was the thinking of the last two General Chapters of both the brothers and the sisters, which invited the whole Congregation to discern and act upon our shared charism and mission, and to collaborate in ministry wherever possible. We must seek in the years ahead to develop not only attitudes but also structures which express more and more the equality and complementarity of the two sexes. We must not see this as a threat, but as an opportunity for prophetic witness.

### **G. Relationship between the First and Third World**

The greater part of humanity which suffers injustice and its consequences is to be found in the Third World. This will demand a reassessment of our resources (personnel and finances) in the years ahead.

If we look at this situation, it is not because we are specialists in economic matters. Rather, it is in order to be more aware that the Western world, - traditionally Christian - has not fully assimilated the Gospel message. Is it possible to continue proclaiming the brotherhood of all men in light of the scandal of the hunger in the world ? Is it possible to celebrate the Eucharist and to share the Bread of Life, the sign and pledge of the eternal banquet in the Kingdom of our Father, without feeling called to share the goods of this world in order to feed the multitudes who are without bread?

The process of restructuring initiated by the General Chapter has as its principal foundation, the principles of international solidarity and inculturation. Even if it is beyond our powers to change the economic structures of the world, in the Congregation we must search for ways to ensure a more evangelical kind of sharing.

The General Government, and many of the Provinces are, at the present, making efforts to promote communication and solidarity between the provinces. We are also supporting and moving towards the coordination of specific aid projects of the Provinces, so that the Congregation may serve the cause of the poor in the Third World more effectively.

The world of today needs clear signs of solidarity which surpass the interests of nations, cultures or ideologies, not only in the material order, but also in the spiritual order. We seek, therefore, to support and give a privileged place to our presence in the Third World, making our Congregation a clear sign of international communion, with a preference for the poor and powerless of this world. This orientation must also be reflected in the development of our formation programs. It will also be a serious consideration, as we consider and review our present apostolic priorities, especially when there is a question of establishing new foundations. The traditional missionary spirit of our Congregation, can only benefit from the strengthening of our commitment to the Third World.

We also have in various parts of the Third World in the Congregation, groups of brothers, who are few in number and for whom the present structures are inadequate. These groups need to be strengthened — not simply because we don't wish to abandon works of the Congregation, but also because we wish the charism of our Founders to be incarnated among new peoples and cultures.

## **H. Peace**

*« The arms race is one of the greatest curses on the human race and the harm it inflicts on the poor is more than can be endured... »*

*(Gaudium et Spes, N° 81)*

Many feel impotent when faced with so daunting a problem as the arms race. Yet its roots are with us every day in the form of ignorance, reliance on violence, extreme nationalism, tolerance of injustice, etc. Rather than yielding to the temptation of inaction, we must be conscious of our role as peacemakers, bearing in mind that the first gift of the risen Saviour to His followers was His gift to peace (*Jn. 20: 20*). But if we hope to effectively carry out our role as peacemakers, we must first ensure that our own attitudes and actions are completely blameless. We must also act, for «The vision of Christian non-violence is not passive about injustice and the defense of the rights of others».

Our commitment to the poor demands that we do all in our power, especially through our teaching and preaching, to alert our people and influence public opinion in such a way that we help bring an end to what Pope Paul VI many times called «*this scandalous waste*». As Eisenhower once said: "*Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired, signifies, in a final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, from those who are cold and not clothed*".

Since our work in this area involves the remaking of peoples' minds, we should not expect immediate results. We must not let that deter us however, because the role of the sower is an essential one, if peace is to flourish in our world.

*« There is a very urgent need of re-education and a new orientation of public opinion. Those engaged in the work of education, especially youth education and the people who mould public opinion, should regard it as their most important task to educate the minds of men to renewed sentiments of peace. »*

*(Gaudium et Spes, N° 82)*

Christians must denounce war and violence as sinful and against God's will and the interests of the human person. John Paul II in England last year said: *« People are having to endure the shadow of a nuclear nightmare yet people everywhere long for peace. »* Our Congregation must not be found wanting in the pursuit of that peace.

We must go further, we must remember the words of Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* N°37: *« The Church cannot accept any form of violence, and especially of armed violence — for this cannot be restrained when once it is unleashed — nor the death of any man as a method of liberation. She knows that violence always provokes violence and inevitably gives rise to new forms of oppression, new forms of servitude even more grievous than those from which men were supposed to be emancipated. We stated this clearly during our recent visit to Columbia: " We urge you not to put your trust in violence or revolution; this attitude is repugnant to the Christian spirit, and so far from helping, it may well hinder the social progress to which you rightly aspire. We feel bound to affirm and to re-affirm that violence is neither Christian nor evangelical, and sudden or violent structural changes are chimerical and of their very nature ineffective and beyond all doubt unworthy of human dignity».*

## **X. CONCLUSION**

We have seen the principal characteristics of the Modern World and the challenges they present to the people of God and consequently to the Congregation, which exists for the people. We are living in a crucial moment in the history of man. The choice before man is between a *«new social order or total war»*.

The Congregation seeks to face this situation with all the means at its disposal. We seek to imitate Jesus Christ in His attitudes of community and poverty. There is a great need for a new '*communion in Christ*' if we are to respond to the challenge of '*building a better world in solidarity with the poor*'. *«We don't exaggerate saying that there exists in the modern world a strange tragic cry to be evangelized» (E. N. N° 55)*. Should we yield before the temptation of believing that fraternity and justice are impossible realities?

The Chapter of 1982 called all of us to personal conversion so that we might become a really authentic evangelizing community. The renewal of the Congregation must continue. This will not happen unless all our members

open themselves to the Spirit of God. This letter is an effort to encourage our members in the line the Spirit seems to be indicating to us. I ask all our brothers to reflect on its contents, and to make it a subject of dialogue in their communities. Each member and each community has the responsibility to see how the values we have written of can be incarnated in their own lives.

What we are talking about is not something incidental to our lives, we are not concerned with one apostolate among others but with the full preaching of the Gospel message. « *Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation* » (Introd. Synod Doc. 1971). We are concerned with an approach to the Gospel which will radically affect not only all our apostolates, but even the living out of religious life itself.

Each one of us, and the Congregation as a whole needs to be converted and renewed in respect to evangelical poverty if we are to be true evangelizers. There is no conversion without a change of mentality and attitude. We ourselves need to be evangelized — especially by the poor. The test of an authentic conversion is always concrete commitment.

Evangelical poverty is a commitment, which assumes freely and out of love, the condition of the poor of this world. It follows the example of Christ who made His own all the consequences linked with the sinful condition of mankind (cf. *Philipans 2: 5-8*) and who, «*though being rich, became poor*» (2 *Cor. 8: 9*) for our salvation. The spirituality of the Anawim characterizes the people of God. Our security, the guarantee of our effectiveness must come from our faith in the power of God, and in the resurrection of Christ. In an attitude of openness to the Lord and trusting in His Providence, we expect everything from Him (cf. *Matthew 5: 3*). Valuing the goods of this world, we must not get attached to them, recognizing the superior values of the goods of the Kingdom (Ps. 49 (48): 6-13, 17-21; Ps. 62 (61): 11; Fs. 73 (72): 25-28; Mt. 6: 19-34; Lc. 12: 15).

We must be ready to renounce every form of power and privilege, so that we are able to exercise a prophetic role in the world — with no vested interests, but only our zeal for the coming of the Kingdom of justice and peace on this earth.

*«As Christ realized the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, so the Church is destined to go the same way in order to communicate to mankind the fruits of salvation" (LG. N° 8),*

**In solidarity with the poor of this world** the Congregation has to recognize itself among the poor; not out of sociological motives, but out of fidelity to Christ. We must live lives which are not only 'poor *in spirit, but poor in fact*' (*Perfectae Caritatis*). Our own life-style, houses, works, traveling, clothing, etc. must not be a counter witness to this norm of 'Perfectae Caritatis'. We must be ready to put all our material goods at the service of the Kingdom. *"Each private property is charged with a social mortgage" (John Paul II at San Domingo).*

*« Religious must surpass all others by their example of true evangelical poverty... let the religious, of their own free will, be content with the things that are needed for properly fulfilling their way of life, shunning luxuries by which the religious life is devitalized. Let them always bear in mind the social condition of the people among whom they live. Let them be preoccupied with using the temporal goods which Divine Providence has bestowed on them, to minister to the genuine necessities of the needy, whether those in need of assistance, be their fellow countrymen or those who live in other parts of the world » (Pope Paul VI, May 23, 1964).*

As John Paul II expressed it: *« The poor of the world are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You must never be content to leave them just the crumbs from the feast. You must take of your substance, and not just of your abundance in order to help them. And you must treat them like guests at the family table».*

We have to run counter to the actual 'consumer' society, in which so many identify success with material possessions, willing only to have more and better things at the expense of others. The world needs our testimony that there are values other than riches, power and prestige. We have to testify to this as a community.

Conscious of the fact that *«the cause of God is the cause of the poor»*, we have to make a choice in favour of all that is authentically human, and to testify in this manner that a man has more value than a party, a system, an ideology.

The Congregation has to be **the voice** of **the** poor — persons, groups, villages, everywhere it is present — and hence call all to conversion to justice as a foundation of community and peace. We have to work to create conditions so that the voice of the poor can be heard. The Congregation has to make a strong stand in favour of justice, by word and by deed. It must sustain and help its members and all those who make a stand in favour of justice. We must encourage those who battle for a new order, breathe new life into those who become tired, encourage those who are despairing, who are disappointed. We must be ready to accuse inhuman forms of power, oppression, greed; we must adopt clear attitudes against the established structures of injustice; we must defend human rights against all forms of discrimination, political persecution, abuse of power. We must give every support to organizations which defend peace, justice and human rights. We have to be prepared to accept that our commitment to justice will bring on ourselves the persecution of the rich and powerful of this world, and a situation of real poverty. Our poverty must be a commitment of solidarity with those who are suffering, and a sign of the inestimable worth of the poor in the sight of the Lord.

We must ask ourselves, *«What are the concerns which are absorbing the energy and resources of our Congregation at the present time? What are the criteria determining the apostolates of the Congregation, the Provinces, the communities, the members? »* We have to incorporate, in a climate of community discernment, on all levels of the Congregation, the implications of the first orientation of the General Chapter of 1982, that is, *«to build a more just world in solidarity with the poor»*.

In the words of Pope John Paul II when he announced this Jubilee Year, « We are living in a world that suffers; so many of our brothers and sisters, have a very sad heritage of privation, of anxiety, of pain that cannot leave anyone indifferent. The Redemption opens to us the magnificent book of our solidarity with the suffering Christ, and in Him, introduces us into the mystery of our solidarity with our suffering brothers and sisters ». Our religious life must be a participation in depth in the life and mission of Christ who comes to reconcile men with their Father and with each other. The life of each one of us must be a prophecy of the Good News; Jesus our Saviour has come. He has come to bring Good News to the poor.

*"May the God of hope bring you such joy and peace in your faith that the power of the Holy Spirit will remove all bounds to hope» (Rom. 15: 13).*

Affectionately,

Your Brother in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and  
Mary

Fr. Patrick BRADLEY ss. cc.

Superior Genera)

# APPENDIX

## A. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER 1982

1. *The General Government shall create structures to promote communication and solidarity between the Provinces. It shall also support specific aid projects, so as to enable the Congregation to serve the cause of the poor more effectively.*
2. *The Provinces shall commit themselves to giving a percentage of their income to the poor annually.*
3. *The option for the poor will be one of the fundamental criteria in establishing apostolic priorities and in choosing the locations for new communities.*
4. *The Communities shall take great care to ensure a real stability in the matter of their commitments to the poor, so that they, the poor, shall not be made to suffer disillusionment.*

## B. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

The following is a list of questions suggested simply as an aid to reflection both on the personal and community level. It is by no means meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather an effort to help concretize some of the issues a little more.

### PERSONAL

1. Who are, for you, here and now, the poor?
2. What kind of poor people do you meet in your everyday life?
3. Do you have sufficient personal contact with poor people?

### COMMUNITY

1. Is «*the building of a more just world in solidarity with the poor*» a priority for your religious life?
2. What type of SS. CC. Communities, do we need here and now, to realize the First Orientation?
3. What type of commitment is required from the individual member, from each local community, each Province by this First Orientation?



4. Do we as community examine and analyze cries of protest from whatever source in regard to injustice and human rights?
5. Are we willing to hear the prophetic voices in our ranks and among the poor themselves?
6. Have we invited individual members or communities to dedicate themselves to the direct promotion of justice or the suppression of injustice?
7. Do our Liturgies and prayer life reflect a commitment to Social Justice?

### **FORMATION**

1. Are education for justice and the social doctrine of the Church important factors in all our formation programs?
2. Does formation go beyond information on the intellectual level to a direct acquaintance, by those in formation, with the conditions of injustice in our world?
3. Are our young religious in formation becoming personally acquainted with the poor?

### **LIFE-STYLE / MATERIAL RESOURCES**

1. Are we protesting against consumerism not only by our own inner lives but by corporate witness?
2. Are we sure that the material resources we possess are being used to maximum effect to serve the poor?
3. Do we show solidarity to those in need by opening our doors to them?
4. Is Social Justice a constant yardstick in assessing our capital, our real estate, our investments?
5. Are equitable financial arrangements made with those who leave the Congregation after years of devoted service?
6. Are the terms of employment just in all communities and Provinces?
7. Is a percentage of each Province's income being contributed to justice and development projects?
8. Are any of our structures or activities expressive of injustice towards women?

## **APOSTOLATES AND MINISTRY**

1. Are we prepared to make a social analysis of our area and if necessary be willing to change our apostolic priorities in the light of these findings?
2. Are we willing to initiate pilot programs of direct ministry with and to the poor in our Provinces?
3. Do we consider the possibility of part-time ministry by our members to groups alienated or marginalized within society or within the Church, e. g. alcoholics, prisoners, handicapped, divorced, etc. ?
4. Are we conscious that the fight against injustice is a collective one which must be undertaken with those who live in situations of injustice?
5. Do we support the creation of new ministries and new forms of Christian communities which are geared to the elimination of poverty and oppression?
6. In our ministries do we seek to develop evangelizing groups of laity with an option for the poor?
7. In our ministries are we organizing the poor as we live and work among them in order that they may receive justice?
8. Are we willing to speak out against the extravagant life-style of some in our areas in the face of the dire poverty of others even if it means losing the favor of the powerful?
9. In our apostolates are we conscious of the need to recognize the full equality of women?

## **EDUCATION**

1. Do the structures of our schools respect the individual and allow our students to participate fully in school life?
2. Do our schools mirror the institutional violence in society through rigid discipline and competitive spirit?
3. Do we provide scholarships in our schools for the poor and minorities who suffer injustice?
4. Are we providing for courses in Social Justice in our educational institutions?
5. Are we educating young people to be persons for others, for national and international understanding, for service, for political and social action in the local community?

## **INTERNATIONAL**

1. Are we developing processes and programs to promote a greater global awareness within our religious communities?
2. Is your Province willing to share its resources in order to do away with the inequalities which exist within the Congregation?
3. Are we prepared to give financial and personal assistance to the Third World, even when this entails sacrifice?
4. Are we moving towards authentic acculturation especially in countries of the Third World?
5. In our ministries do we remind people that the arms race is inextricably linked to poverty, hunger, and oppression throughout the world?
6. Do we encourage the participation of our brothers and sisters in national and international organizations promoting justice and peace and the defense of human rights?
7. Do we try to understand the economic forces at work in our world, e. g. the role of the multinationals?
8. In our international community are we free of prejudice in those areas where members of different nationalities live and work together?