

Go,  
Rebuild  
My Church!

**Comprehensive  
Course on the  
Franciscan  
Mission  
Charism**



Francis  
of Assisi  
and the Option  
for the  
Poor

Lesson Unit 19

The documents of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptoris Missio* have deeply affected the understanding of mission. Constant efforts are being made to clarify its purpose and objectives, and to determine the most appropriate methods to carry it out. *Go, Rebuild My Church: A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*, provides a particular context to stimulate dialogue about the many dimensions of mission and the inevitable recognition of the equality, dignity and humanity of all persons. The course is unique, since it is genuinely inter-Franciscan and inter-cultural. An ongoing process for exchange among all members of the Franciscan Family from six continents provides for a creative meshing of the best in current theology, Franciscan research and pastoral practice. The vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent our search for a fuller understanding of humanity in the light of the Gospel and the Person of Jesus Christ.

As Franciscans, with the world as our *cloister*, we welcome this refreshing moment of intercultural dialogue. Francis was the first among founders to situate the missionary dimension of the Gospel call clearly within his rule. This study reawakens us to the challenge and genuineness of Francis' message for our own times.



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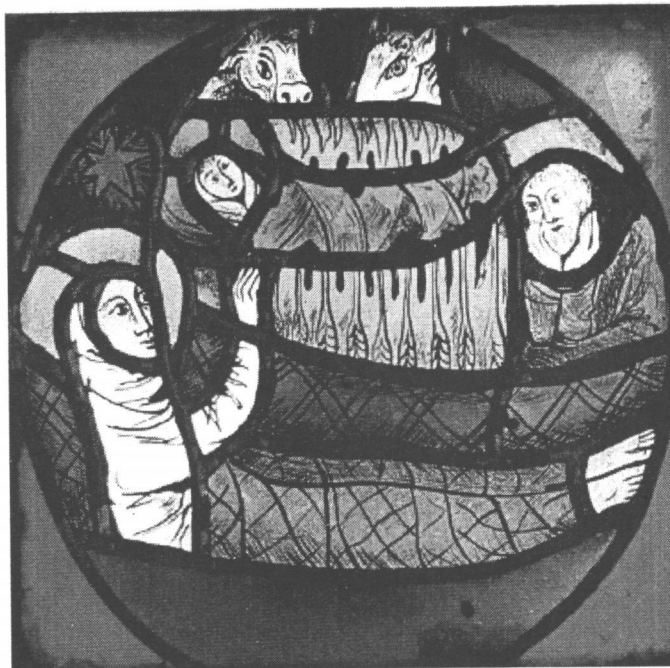


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# Go, Rebuild My Church!

*A Comprehensive Course on the Franciscan Mission Charism*



## Francis of Assisi and the Option for the Poor



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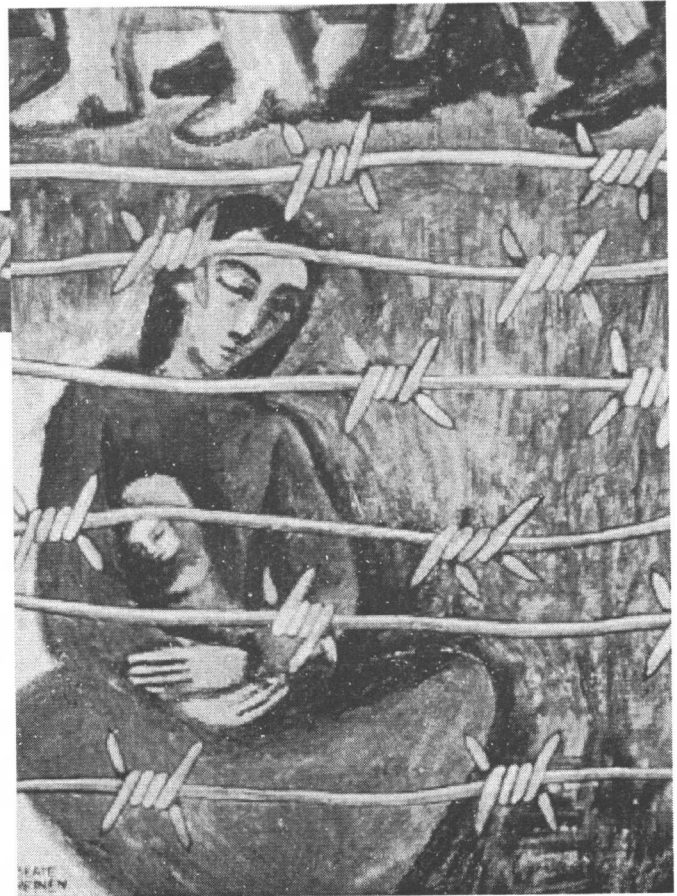


## n the Dignity of the Poor

Francis was like the poor in everything. He wanted to be like them; in fact, he could not bear seeing anyone poorer than himself. And so he gave away everything he possessed that the poor did not have. Thomas of Celano gives this account:



*One day when Francis was preaching, a certain poor and infirm man came to the place. Pitying his double affliction, namely, his want and his feebleness, Francis began to speak with his companion about poverty. And when, suffering with the sufferer, Francis' heart had become deeply afflicted, the companion of the saint said to him: 'Brother, it is true that this man is poor, but it may also be true that nowhere in the whole province is there a man who is richer in his desires.' Immediately the saint rebuked him and said to him when he admitted his guilt: 'Hurry quickly and take off your tunic and cast yourself down at the feet of this poor man and acknowledge your guilt. And do not only ask for forgiveness, but ask him also to pray for you.'*



*He obeyed and went to make satisfaction and he came back. The saint said to him: 'When you see a poor man, Brother, an image is placed before you of the Lord and his poor mother. So too in the sick consider the infirmities which the Lord took upon himself for us' (2C 85).*



# Introduction

A



## spects of Poverty

Poverty is one of the most important themes that people fought over in the course of the history of the church. This is based on the life of the poor Jesus and his Sermon on the Mount. This became the foundation for the early Christian practice of holding property in common (cf. Acts 2 and 4), of the desert fathers, monasticism, the poverty movements, the mendicant Orders in the 12th and 13th centuries and the religious Orders devoted to charitable works founded in the 19th century. Concern about poverty led to the development of the Catholic social doctrine under Pope Leo XIII and finally the Bible-justified option for the poor since the Second Vatican Council. At all times we encounter Christians, who wish to follow Jesus literally, and, as always, this was synonymous with more or less radical forms of voluntary poverty.

Of course we have to realise that poverty is understood in different ways. Poverty is, first of



*The Sermon on the Mount.*

all, a forced situation, a suffering that must be overcome. Poverty is also a freely chosen ideal, a virtue, an aid to a greater personal freedom, which is a part of the striving for perfection.

The understanding of this ideal changes with the corresponding changes in economic and social situations. Today we are aware that the discussions on this ideal were done to a great extent without considering the people who had to suffer poverty day in and day out. Jesus however turns directly to the poor.

# Survey

B



## he Evangelical Option

This lesson deals with the poor, for whom Francis and Clare made their evangelical option.<sup>1</sup> In the **first part** we will turn to the poor, first in the context of the present world, then in the Bible and finally in the Middle Ages.

In the **second part** we will first deal with the social and economic realities of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

With this background we will try to understand the basic experience of Francis and Clare in the following of the poor Jesus. We will likewise delve into the experiences of the early companions of Francis and Clare. In the **third part** we will summarise some basic perspectives.

<sup>1</sup> the preferential option for the poor.



# Information



## Poverty and the Poor

### The Poor at the End of the 20th Century

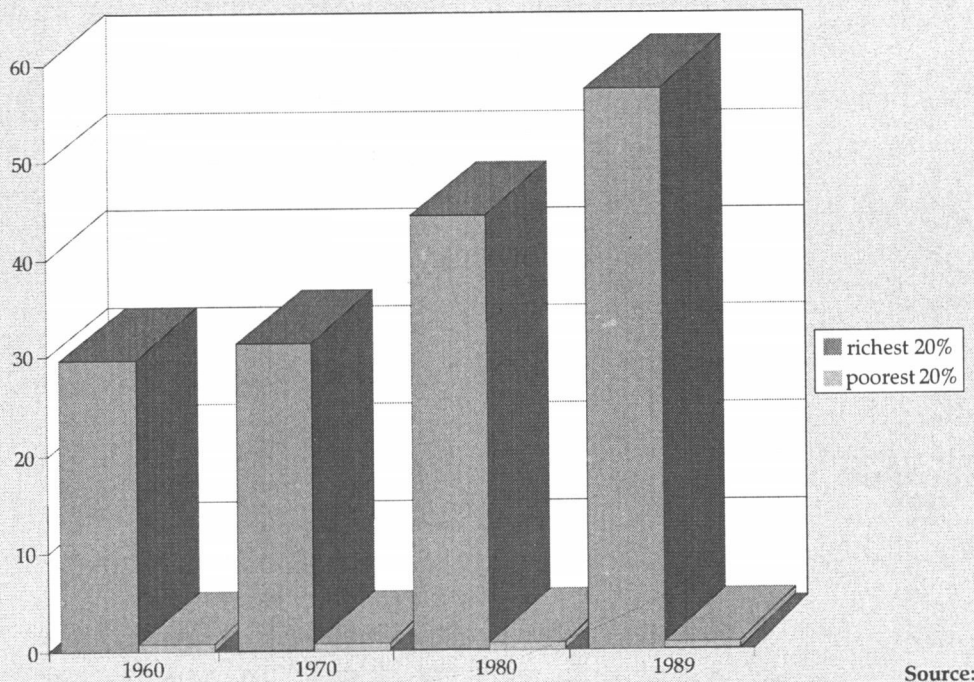


- *Statistics on Social, Economic, and Political Levels*

Towards the end of the second millennium, the number of people who are forced to live in poverty has multiplied. At the same time the rich become richer. Also, the gap between the industrial nations and the countries that are consid-

ered third class (*Third World*<sup>2</sup>) becomes wider. The seven richest industrialised nations (G7)<sup>3</sup> are so concentrated on their own interests and problems, just like the rich in the so-called Third World countries, that a just world economic

Income gap between the richest and the poorest 20% of the world population during the years 1961 – 1989.



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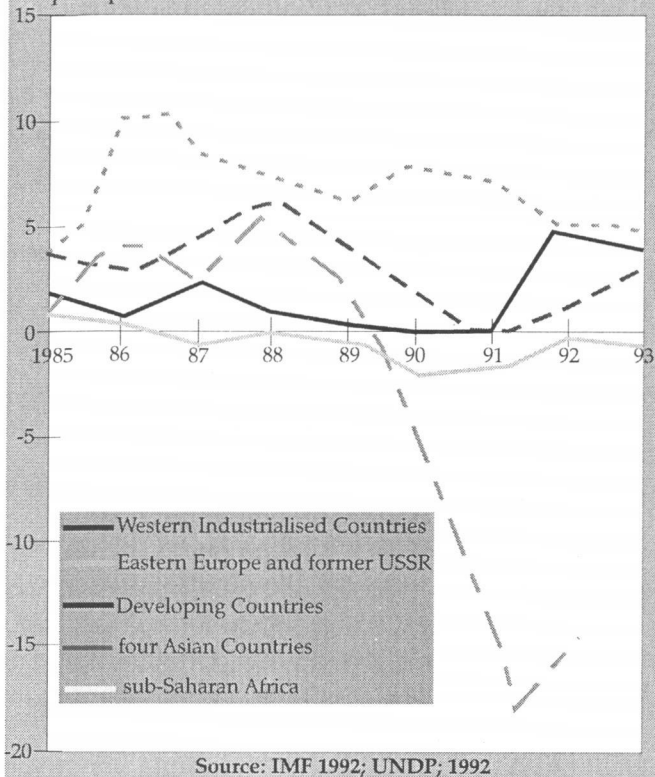
IMF 1992; UNDP 1992.

<sup>2</sup> not to be understood as a geographical term but as an economic classification. It means the less developed, particularly the least developed countries.

<sup>3</sup> Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Canada, USA.



**Income gap between the richest and the poorest 20% of the world population.**  
Real growth of the Brutto Inland Product (BIP) per capita from 1985-1993.



order is not in sight. There is an unjust distribution of income everywhere.

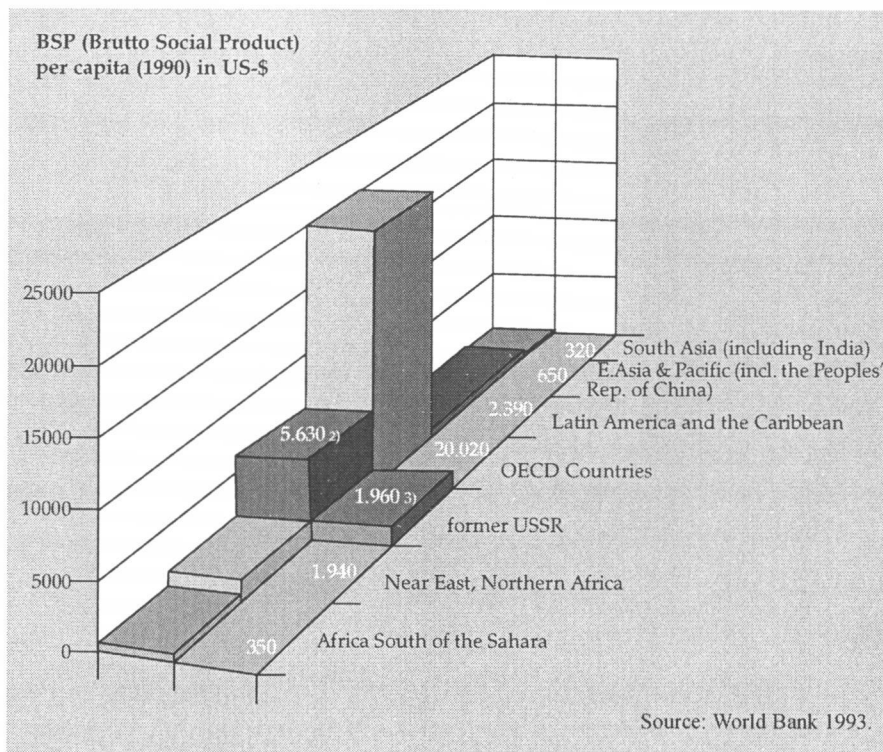
The unjust trading conditions between North and South lead to an even greater impoverishment in the Third World countries.

Before the industrial revolution, around 1750, the differences in the standard of living between the countries that we consider today as developed and those that we describe as underdeveloped were still very small. The situation had changed greatly only in the last hundred years: the gap between the two groups of countries began to open. Around 1850 the industrially developed countries had a per capita income<sup>4</sup> of 150 to 170 dollars. Today their per capita income is between 6,000 and 32,250 US Dollars (Switzerland) while the per capita income of the poorest countries is still about 420 US Dollars. In 1970, this ratio was about 40:1.

This development was due to the conquest and subjugation of foreign countries by European colonial powers. From history we know that money generates money. This process accelerated the accumulation of capital<sup>5</sup> until today. With the help of capital, technology<sup>6</sup> is further developed. As a result of this, the industrially undeveloped countries are forced to be increasingly dependent on the rich countries and thus

become poor. Therefore, development runs an unequal and unjust course: the wealth of one is the burden of the poor.

As money generates money, poverty causes poverty. The Scandinavian economist R. Nurske rephrased it thus: the poor are poor because they are poor. Their income is too meagre



<sup>4</sup> indicator of economic development in the comparison of countries. To calculate it, the total net income is divided by the number of inhabitants.

<sup>5</sup> accumulated money or goods such as buildings, machines and lands that could be utilized for the production of other goods.

<sup>6</sup> science of the production process applied to and used in engineering.

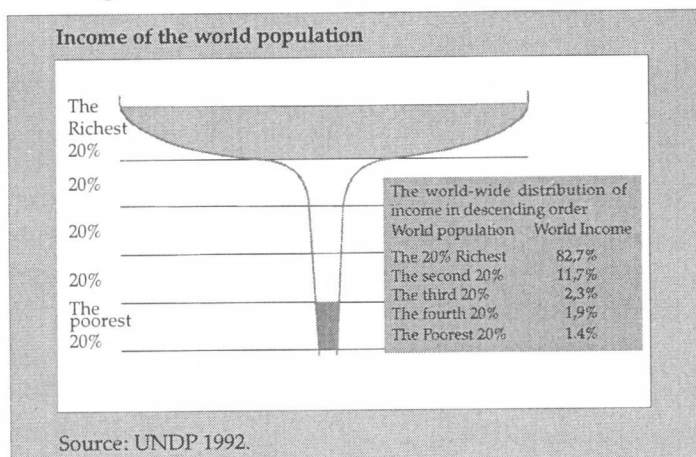




for them to be able to set aside any savings. Because of this they cannot invest, that means, their machines and factories become obsolete and dilapidated. As a result they cannot produce enough products to depend on for subsistence, much less to provide for the future. A direct consequence of this is meagre monthly salaries for employees and so the wheel destitute poverty turns full circle.

From the 1992 *Report on Human Development* of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), we find that:

- ◆◆◆ 82.7% of the world's income goes to 20% of the richest nations;
- ◆◆◆ while only 1.4% of the world's income go to 20% of the poorest nations.



- ◆◆◆ In 1960 the rich nations had an income that was 30 times higher than those of the poor nations. This ratio doubled in 1990. The rich nations possessed 60 times more than the poor ones.

**Global income inequalities between the richest and the poorest 20% of the world's population 1960 – 1989 (Percentage share of global income)**

	Poorest	Richest	Relation Richest - Poorest	Gini-co-efficient*
1960	2,3	70,2	30 to 1	0,69
1970	2,3	73,9	32 to 1	0,71
1980	1,7	76,3	45 to 1	0,79
1989	1,4	82,7	59 to 1	0,87

\* The Gini co-efficient measures the income distribution: the higher the value, the more unequal is the relation of the distribution.

Twenty percent of the poor population of the world have a share

- ◆◆◆ in only 0.2% of the international loans granted by the World Bank;
- ◆◆◆ 1.3% of international investments;
- ◆◆◆ 1% of international trade and
- ◆◆◆ 1.4% of international income.

The poor countries have no access

- ◆◆◆ to credits: they can hardly borrow money;
- ◆◆◆ to capital: they cannot amass their own fortune;
- ◆◆◆ to technology: they cannot decisively improve the methods of production.

Compared to the developing countries, the countries of the north possess nine times the number of scientists and technically skilled workers and 24 times the investments in the field of technology.

We live in an unjust world. The right of every person to a balanced diet, as laid down in Article 25 of the *Declaration of Human Rights*, exists until now only in theory. The reality is different:

- ◆◆◆ 25% of the world's population are overfed or sufficiently nourished;
- ◆◆◆ 15% live with a qualitatively sufficient diet (2500/2800 calories<sup>7</sup>), but low in protein;
- ◆◆◆ 20% are at the border of 2500 cal/day, that still have insufficient protein;
- ◆◆◆ 30% of the world population are malnourished;
- ◆◆◆ 10% of the people who live in the world suffer from chronic hunger.
- ◆◆◆ In Europe, each person consumes 70 kilos of meat per year, while in Central Africa a person consumes only 1 kilo per year;
- ◆◆◆ A European consumes 100 litres of milk per year, while a Peruvian only 10 litres.

<sup>7</sup> unit of energy, specially thermal energy.

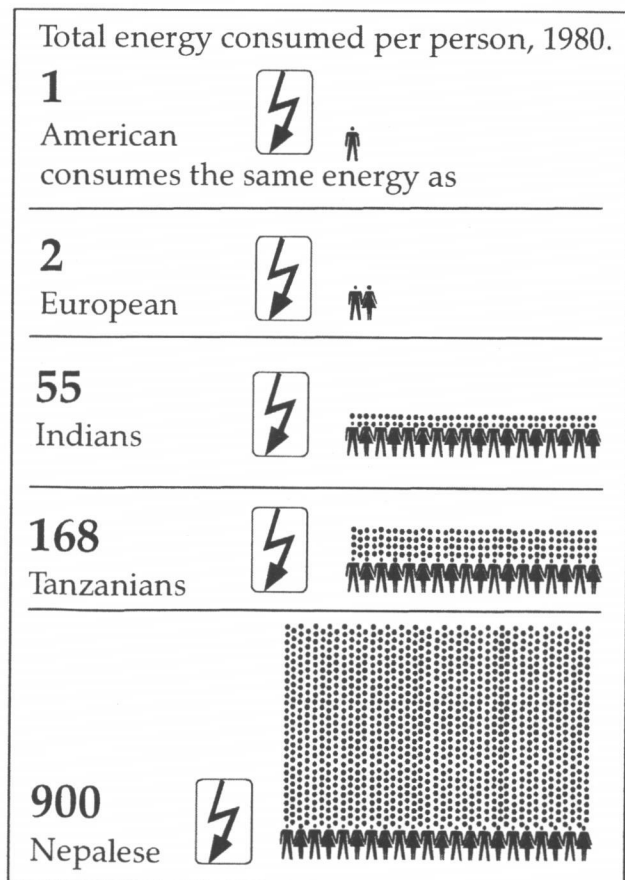


Therefore, we can safely conclude that 60% of the world's population suffers from malnutrition in various degrees. It is estimated that in the year 1980, 16 million children under five years of age died of malnutrition.

*In the midst of huge numbers deprived of the bare necessities of life there are some who live in riches and squander their wealth; and this happens in less developed areas as well. Luxury and misery exist side by side. While a few individuals enjoy almost unlimited freedom of choice, the vast majority have no chance whatever of exercising personal initiative and responsibility, and quite often have to live and work in conditions unworthy of human beings (GS 63).*

The rich often view with concern the population growth of the poor and get involved in family planning campaigns. Or they say that the mineral resources are limited. But still, a single North American consumes as much energy as

- ◆◆◆ 2 Europeans,
- ◆◆◆ 55 Indians,
- ◆◆◆ 168 Tanzanians and
- ◆◆◆ 900 Nepalese.



- ◆◆◆ Seventy percent of the poor population consume
- ◆◆◆ 15 % of energy;
- ◆◆◆ 30 % of grain;
- ◆◆◆ they receive 18% of the trade profits,
- ◆◆◆ possess 8% of the industries,
- ◆◆◆ spend 6% in health care
- ◆◆◆ and possess 17% of the produced wealth (= of the gross national product).

Pope John Paul II said in Canada:

*The poor south will judge the rich north. And the poor will judge all those who withhold from them the wealth and amass for themselves the imperialistic monopoly of economic and political power at the expense of others (From the Sermon on September 17, 1984 in Edmonton, Canada).*

A billion children live in poor countries. There,

- ◆◆◆ every fourth child suffers from hunger;
- ◆◆◆ two to five children are unable to attend school;
- ◆◆◆ two to five children live in rural areas without drinkable water
- ◆◆◆ and four to five children receive no medical care.

#### • Total population

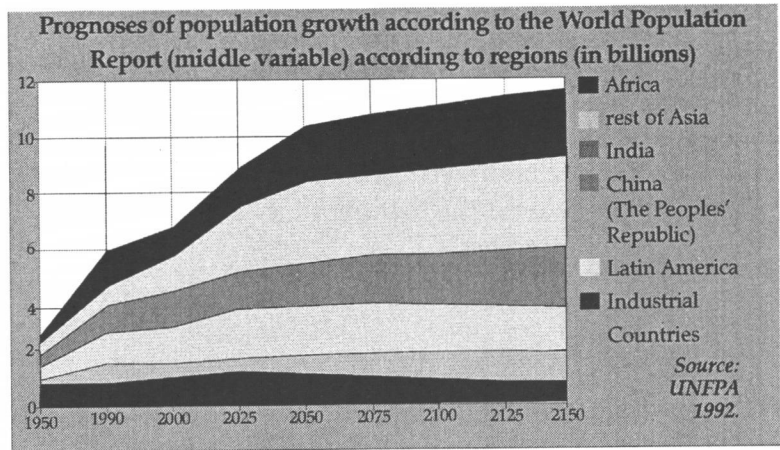
Based on statements of the United Nations, the world population rose to five billion 480 million in 1992. In the year 2000 it was expected to reach more than six billion. In the next century, an average yearly growth of 97 million is expected, the highest in the history of mankind.

This constantly increasing population growth and the dwindling of natural resources will lead to an ecological catastrophe on the global level if immediate measures are not taken. Only the balance between population, consumption and development will make the eradication of life-threatening poverty possible, without destroying the foundations of life in the process.



The United Nations' 1998 Human Development Report indicated that the poorest 20% of the world's population were left out of the consumption explosion. Well over a billion people were deprived of basic consumption needs. Of the 4.4 billion people in developing countries, nearly 60% lacked basic sanitation. About 30% had no access to clean water; 25% had no adequate housing, and 20% had no access to modern health services. 20% of the children were not in school up to grade five. More than 20% did not get enough dietary energy and protein; micronutrient deficiencies were even more widespread. World-wide, two billion people were found to be anaemic, including 55 million in industrialised countries. In developing countries, only a privileged minority had access to motorised transport, telecommunications and modern energy.

Inequalities in consumption are stark. Globally, the richest 20% of the world's population, all found in the highest-income countries, account for 86% of the world's total private consumption, while the poorest 20% a minuscule 1.3%. More specifically, the richest 20% consume 45% of all meat and fish, 58% of total energy, have 74% of all telephone lines, used 84% of all paper, and own 78% of the world's vehicle fleet. On the other hand, the world's poorest 20% consume only 5% of all meat and fish, 4% of total energy, have 1% of all telephone lines, use 1.1% of all paper, and own less than 1% of the world's vehicle fleet.

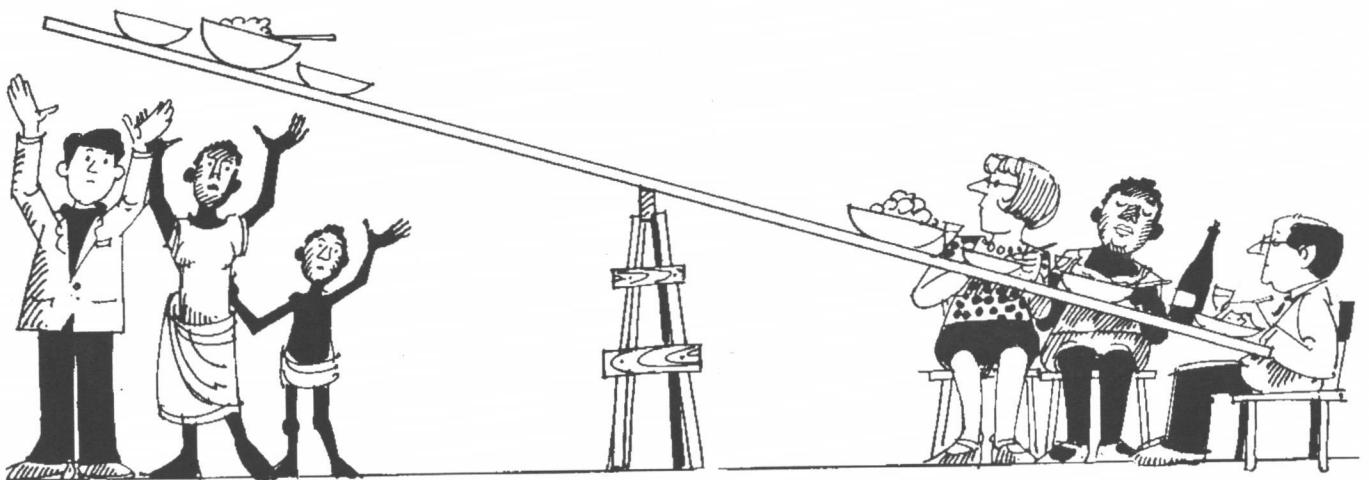


*One must denounce the existence of economic, financial and social structures which, although manipulated by people, often function almost automatically, thus accentuating the situation of wealth for some and poverty for the rest (John Paul II, SRS 16).*

In other words, in the present economic order, which the Latin Americans denounce as "unrestrained capitalism," the middle class and the lowest income classes must foot the bill.

To call free competition between such unequal groups of people is like allowing a fight between wolves and sheep. In any competition there are winners and losers. The "free market economy" inevitably strengthens and enriches those who own the capital. It weakens and makes poor those who rely only on their human power.

This injustice has become the greatest challenge to mankind. The greater the injustice in this world, the stronger is political and social unrest. A world where wealth and luxury increase for a few while the great majority sink deeper and

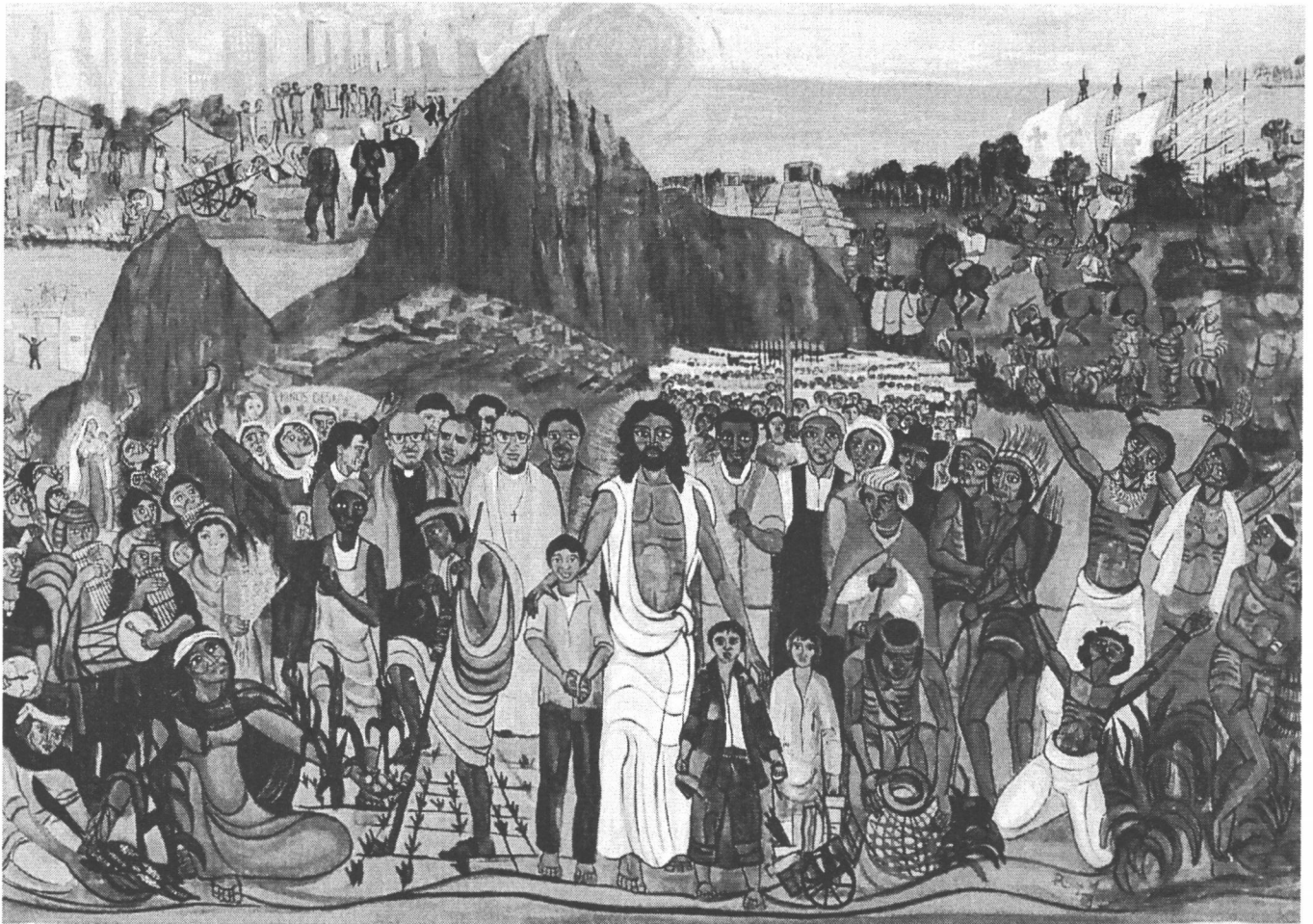




deeper into poverty and misery, is a world without a future. Such a development will lead to a dreadful explosion sooner rather than later.

In Latin America, the income of the poor in the large cities depreciated by 10% between 1980 and 1990. At the same time the income of the 5% richest people increased by 15%.

Also in its 1992 "Report on Human Development", the United Nations shows us a world where the gap between the poor and the rich is constantly widening. As we have already seen, the "chasm of inequality" deepens more and more, mostly, we believe, because the neoliberal economic model is so widely accepted (cf. Lesson 21).



*The Risen Lord on the way with the People of God.*

### • Further Effects of Poverty

In 1992 the Latin American bishops in St. Domingo called on all Christians of the continent to have a more thorough understanding of poverty:

*Let us specially think about those who suffer: the sick, the old, those who live alone, the abandoned children. Let us also look at those who become victims of injustice: those who live a marginal existence and the poorest of the poor, the inhabitants of the outlying*

*districts of the big cities, the indigenous people and the African-Americans, the farm workers and those who do not own land, the unemployed and the homeless, and finally the women, whose rights are disregarded. Other forms of oppression are also our concern: violence and pornography, drug trafficking and abuse, terrorism and kidnapping and many other serious problems (SD 17).*



## The Poor in the Old Testament

Holy Scripture is a rich mosaic of traditions and beliefs. We do not find a unified "theology of poverty" in it, but basic statements on poverty. The terms that are used for the poor show a diverse picture.

In **Hebrew**, the original language of the Bible, the poor are those

- ◆◆◆ who need help;
- ◆◆◆ who struggle to survive;
- ◆◆◆ who do without the things that are necessary in order to instil respect; they are neither noble, nor powerful or educated, therefore, despised, exploited and at the mercy of the injustice of those who possess adequate instruments of power.

The condition of the poor is also described in other terms in the Old Testament. The translations into Greek, the Septuagint, and into Latin, the Vulgate, found their way in other cultures. Different life situations are reflected in different concepts of what it means to be poor.

The **Greek** translation of the Old Testament offers us three key words: Poor are

- ◆◆◆ those who have to work in order to live;
- ◆◆◆ those who need the help of others to live;
- ◆◆◆ those who are plagued by worries.

In the **Latin Bible**, there are words that describe the poor as

- ◆◆◆ those who produce little (*egenus*);
- ◆◆◆ those who are needy and do not possess wealth (*inops*) and
- ◆◆◆ the physically handicapped, therefore, beggars (*mendicants*).

From the **theological viewpoint**, we recognise at first sight at least two opposite trends:

- ◆◆◆ Material wealth and health are sure signs of God's blessing; poverty and disease are, therefore, signs of his curse (cf. Lv 25:21; Dt 28:8).

This conviction is held even today in some theological circles. The sociologist Max Weber sees in it the spiritual foundations for the success story of the Protestant-influenced Capitalism.



*The Poor, praying, and above them God who listens to their prayers.*

◆◆◆ The **prophetic tradition** opposes this view: being poor is a trait of the just. The poor are the favourites of God. He commits himself unconditionally to them. "He has compassion for the weak and the lowly, he saves the lives of the poor" (Ps 72:13). "He liberates them from oppression and acts of violence; their blood is precious in his sight" (Ps 72:14). The poor cannot expect help from other people. They have only one single hope: God. That is why in the later books of the Old Testament and then also in the New Testament, they are called "anawim jahwe," the poor of God (cf. the Magnificat and the Beatitudes).

According to the **historian** of the Book of **Deuteronomy**, God always chooses the weakest, the youngest, the unfruitful, the powerless: "Oh, my Lord, how shall I liberate Israel? As you can see, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father's house" (Jgs 6:15).

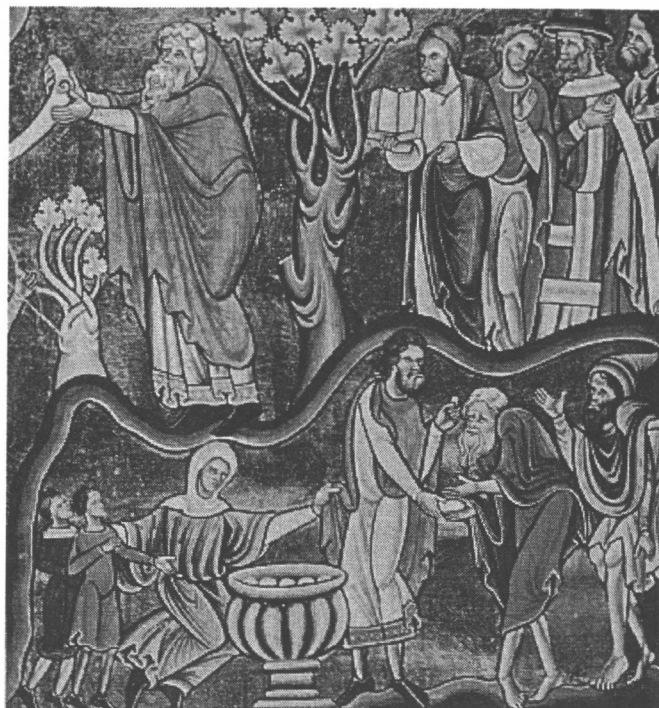
The **prophet Isaiah** expresses concisely the criticism of Jahwe on the rich: "Woe to you who join house to house and connect field with field, till no room remains and you are left to dwell alone in the land" (Is 5:8). According to God's plan, there



should be no poor among God's people. In reality, however, the poor will always be there, namely: those who are made poor by sinful structures, those who become poor by their own fault and those disadvantaged by nature and by strokes of fate. They must be welcomed with open hearts. *"The poor will never completely disappear from your land. That is why I command you: You should open your hand to your needy and poor brothers who live in your land"* (Dt 15:11; cf. Mt 26:11; Mk 14:7; Jn 12:8). These poor people are the ones who will inherit the earth in the end (cf. Mt 5:3).

God exalts the poor, because they are poor. That is why justice and concern for the poor are more important to Him than worship. The task of the just is: *"...sharing your bread with the hungry, welcoming the homeless in your home, clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your kin"* (Is 58:7):

The **Psalms** are, to a large extent, songs of the poor, whose cries God listens to.



*Happy are those who fear the Lord... All goes well for those gracious in lending, who conduct their affairs with justice... Lavishly they give to the poor (Ps 112:1.5.9).*

## Jesus and the Poor

1.3.

During the time of Jesus, Israel was a colony ruled by the Romans, which determined the entire social and economic life. There were beneficiaries and the exploited. In addition there was the class society within the Jewish people themselves: the High Priests, the Council of Elders, and the Scribes on the one hand; the poor, oppressed, uneducated, the anawim, on the other. Jesus knew that he was specially sent to the latter.

The **High Priests** originated from the aristocracy of priests and from wealthy families. They were the official representatives of religion and were responsible for the temple worship. The temple cult was also a business enterprise that gave the high priests political, religious and financial power. For instance, all Jews over twelve years of age, including those who lived abroad - and there were many of them - had to pay annual tithes that, in today's calculations, corresponds to about two days' salary (cf. Lk 18:12; Mt 23:23). In addition, there were offerings and alms of the

rich (cf. Mk 7:11; 11:15; cf. Mk 12:41-44; Jn 2:13-22).

In general the **Sadducees** originated from the aristocracy and many even came from the priestly class. Their task was the temple cult, but some also undertook the task of interpreting scripture. Theologically, they were conservative and rejected the belief in the resurrection of the dead as well as the existence of angels and spirits. Politically they collaborated with the Roman occupying power and profited from it considerably.

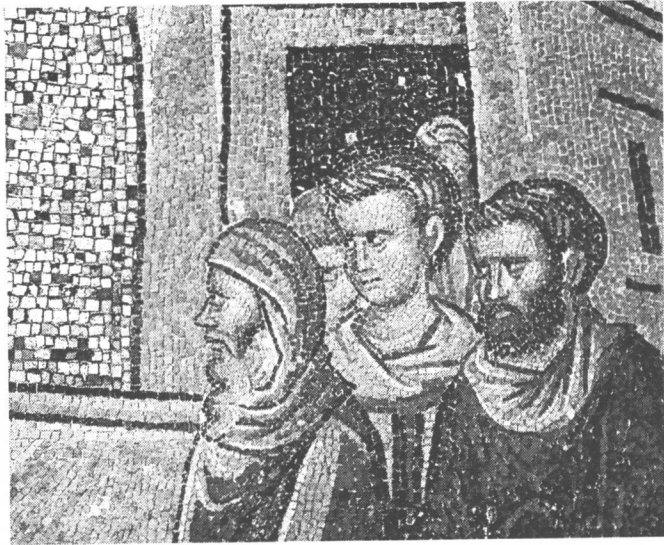
The **Elders** were laymen from the aristocratic families and they had the task of leading the people.

The **Scribes** likewise came from the laity. Their task was threefold: to further develop jurisprudence based on the law of Moses and to adapt it to the conditions of the time; to teach school-children about the law; to administer justice in court hearings.

The **Pharisees** represented the largest group of Scribes. Their name means "set apart", for they







*Pharisees and Scribes.*

separated themselves from the laity by forming a religious sect. They wanted to take the Law of Moses seriously and follow it literally to the last detail. They especially took seriously the instructions on purity. Determined to remain pure, they avoided touching people of doubtful lifestyle. The lack of knowledge of the law on the part of the poor made the Pharisees regard the poor as inferior, as sinners, as people who abandoned their faith, as godless (cf. Lk 18:9; Mt 9:19; Lk 15:1-2; Jn 7:49). Nevertheless, they had a strong influence on the people and controlled the people by making them feel guilty and inferior. They were accused of collecting money from ordinary people under the guise of piety (cf. Mt 23:25-28; Mk 12:40; Lk 11:39; 16:14). In contrast to the Sadducees, they believed in the resurrection.

The **Zealots** (the fanatics) were a political liberation movement. They believed that God would intervene in history only if they did all that was humanly possible to shake off the yoke of the Roman colonial power. Thus, violence and terror were also considered means to liberation. They rejected the national census and the payment of taxes and enjoyed immense sympathies from the lower classes. With reference to the jubilee (cf. Lv 25) they wanted to redistribute property and to free people from the increased mountains of debts. At the start of the Jewish war (65 A.D.), they consistently destroyed the lenders' list of believers to free the poor from the yoke of the rich. Summing up we can say: the people waited for God to change the course of history

and realise his Reign. With it a new era of justice, peace and wealth would dawn, as the prophets had predicted. The land's inhabitants, despised and neglected by their spiritual leaders, were lacking in orientation. The people had nothing to hope for from human support and had no means to change their situation themselves.

Into this situation, where leaders and orientation were lacking, came Jesus, a man from the poor, from the despised Galilee, from Nazareth, from where the leading powers of Jerusalem believed nothing good would come. Jesus saw that this people was like a flock of sheep without shepherds, and so He made himself the "good shepherd" (Jn 10:11-21; cf. Ez 34:11-31) in whom the poor and the lowly saw their hope.



*The Good Shepherd.*



The Gospel of Luke puts the song of hope on the lips of Mary, the hope which awakens with Jesus: He brings down the powerful from their throne, he exalts the lowly, he fills the hungry with good things, he lets the rich go away empty. Jesus is born outside the city walls, in a cave, which serves as a refuge for the poor shepherds and the cattle. Old Simeon interprets Jesus as a sign, meaning that those who are now lying on the ground, will be raised, and those who stand there in full splendour will be brought low. At the beginning of his apostolate, Jesus himself explains the significance of his life as follows:

*So he came to Nazareth, where he grew up, and on Sabbath day he went as usual to the synagogue. When he stood up, in order to read from the Scripture, he was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the passage where it is written: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, for the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and sight to the blind, to set free those who are in prison, and to announce a year of grace from the Lord.'* Jesus then closed the book, gave it back to the assistant, and sat down. All the people in the synagogue had their eyes fixed on him. Then he said to them: 'Today the Scripture passage that you have just heard is fulfilled.' His speech was applauded by everyone; they marvelled at his eloquence and said, is he not the son of Joseph? (Lk 4:16-22).

What the Gospel of Luke narrates later on is really nothing more than what is said here: Jesus firmly commits himself to the poor, the weak, the victims and the underprivileged. This costs him his life in the end.

The other Gospels also have almost the same dynamism. Jesus is portrayed as a man who has nowhere to lay his head and as one who shows a consistent solidarity with the poor. Whoever wishes to follow him must leave all possessions behind and be with the poor (cf. Mk 10). For the poor, the mourners, the weak, the persecuted and exploited must experience and know that the "Reign of God belongs to them," the comfort, life, justice, the land, the whole earth (cf. Mt 5).

After Jesus' death on the cross and after the experience that he lives in spite of all, Christians began to think deeply about what really hap-

pened to them. They discover that there was much more to tell and to believe than individual stories of healing and new-found life. They believed that God basically had come to the side of the people, especially the children and the poor. *Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have revealed this to the little children and concealed it from the great and the powerful (Mt 11:25).*

Jesus shows, so they believe and declare, from the very first moment of his birth to the last gasp on the cross, that God sympathises with the poor. They even say that God has become man. In the *incarnation* we grasp in a symbolic way everything that we can say about God. God goes to the lowliest of people: to the small and poor, to the enslaved and condemned. One thus speaks of God's preferential option for the poor. The biblical hymn therefore praises the *emptying*, the "relinquishing oneself", yes, the "destruction of God" in Jesus. We can hardly find an appropriate translation of the Greek word *kenosis*. In any case, it wants to express that God completely gives Himself to people and only in this way does He remain Himself. This is aptly expressed in the following words of the hymn:



*The Risen Lord among the Poor.*



Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather he emptied himself and took the form of a slave being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of

human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on the cross (Phil 2:6 ff.).

## The Poor in the Middle Ages

1.4.

If the church, in following Jesus, is to be a church of the poor, it must consider the prevailing social context. In order to understand in what context people in the Middle Ages, and that includes Francis of Assisi, viewed poverty, the following distinctions must be made.

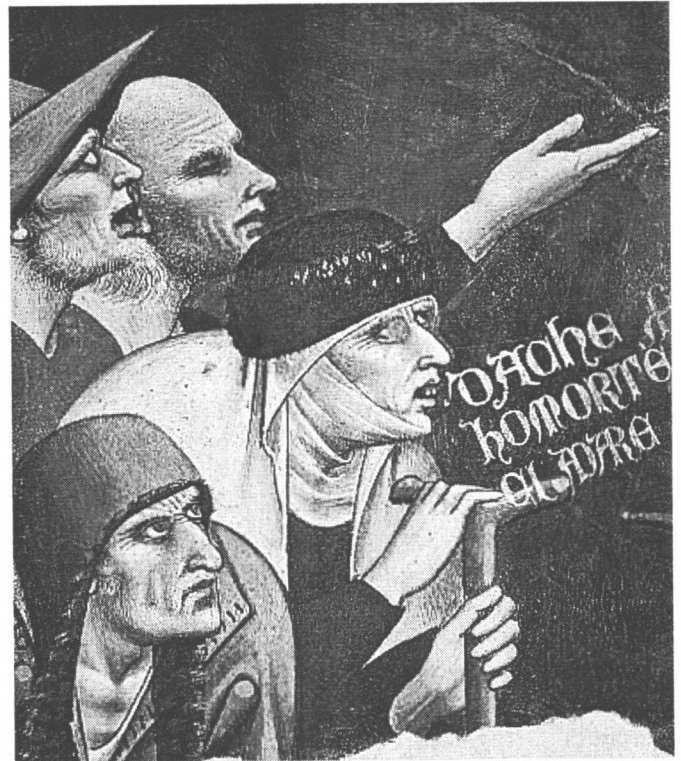
◆◆◆ Poverty often appears in contrast to **knight and soldier**. The poor on whose side God and also Francis stand, are those who possess no weapons, who stand defenceless against military powers and who are often their victims.

◆◆◆ Poverty stands in contrast to **wealth**. The era when Francis lived is strongly marked by this contrast. The commercial revolution had pushed a large segment of the population to the periphery, plunging them in misery and destitution. The poor, on whose side God as well as Francis stand, are those who are oppressed by the power of money and economic interests, and those who are readily sacrificed for the sake of investment, expansion, and capital.

◆◆◆ Poverty must be seen in contrast to **power**. The poor on whose side God, as well as Francis, stand, are those who are voiceless, those excluded from the process of decision-making and those who are powerless in the face of systems and conditions that are imposed on them.

◆◆◆ Poverty is also seen in contrast to **bourgeoisie**. The poor, on whose side God and also Francis stand, are the foreigners, the migrant workers, those who have no rights except those that are granted them; those who are called upon when they are needed and are driven away when they are no longer needed.

◆◆◆ Poverty stands in contrast to **aristocracy**. Although this is more a reality of the past than of the present, it is not without significance today. The poor, on whose side God as well as Francis stands, are those who have no name and also no prestige: the lowest class, the uneducated, the criminals, the prostitutes.



*The Last Judgement.*

◆◆◆ Poverty also has something to do with **health**. The poor, on whose side God as well as Francis stands, are those who are sick: mentally, spiritually and physically.

◆◆◆ Finally there exists a clear relationship between poverty and "being married" or "having





good parents". The poor, on whose side God as well as Francis stands, are those who have no social support, the lonely and unloved: widows, divorcees, orphans, those who cannot marry for social reasons. The above-mentioned pairs of opposites and, presumably many more, must be understood as

a challenge to the whole church, specially to the Franciscan movement. The prevailing social context calls for different forms of witnessing among the poor of this world. In any case it must be emphasised that outside poverty there is no church (= "*extra paupertatem nulla ecclesia*").



## The Early Franciscan Movement

### The Social and Economic Realities in the 13th Century

With the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a second era began. This was the period of early capitalism. Trade and industry were growing continuously. New cities arose, the spirit of the rising bourgeoisie spread. The accumulation of money made a certain connection with industrialisation possible. These signs, already seen in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, were to become typical in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and at present in the countries of the South, i.e., the need for security, opportunities for better work, the hope of a higher standard of living, the attraction of a richer cultural life in the cities which led to a rural exodus. These hopes turned to bitter disappointment for the majority. This resulted in the rise of city slums with desperately poor people who account for up to 80% of a city's total population.

### The Experience of Francis of Assisi

Francis saw the poor as such in the leper. It is as if everything that affects body and soul in a destructive way, is combined in leprosy. As Francis said, the Lord Himself led him among

This situation roused the conscience of individual men and women, who themselves came from rich and powerful families (like Francis and Clare), and this led to various poverty movements. They asked themselves, how they could be Christians in the changed economic conditions, and independently of each other they discovered the story of the unsuccessful calling of a rich young man (cf. Mk 10). The calling to the apostolic life, that is, for a life based on the example of the poor itinerant preachers around Jesus, became the decisive motive for criticism on the Church as well.

The ruling classes in both church and society had neither sufficient vision nor political ability to understand this change. Those who joined in any form of radical protest movement were regarded as heretics and persecuted.

the lepers, and this changed his life completely (cf. Test 1-4).

People of all classes and social strata are found in the Franciscan poverty movement: Francis'





father was a rich merchant, Bernard and Clare came from the aristocracy, Brother Silvester was a priest, Pacificus was a poor and despised clown, Giles was a farmer who could neither read nor write. But all wanted to share the life and the poverty of the defenceless and the underprivileged. This identity with the poor is clearly expressed in the Earlier Rule:

The Brothers "must rejoice when they live among people [who are considered to be] of little worth and who are looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside" (ER 9:2). As an expression of this way of life, Francis gave the name "Friars Minor" to the members of his community.

*that he should not provide for some one else by neglecting himself. But the saint said to him: 'I do not want to be a thief; we will be accused of theft, if we do not give to someone in greater need.' So his companion gave in and Francis gave up the mantle (2C 87).*

At the core of the experiences of Francis of Assisi stands the Jesus of the Gospels, whose footprints and teaching must be discovered and followed without compromise. Jesus is not so much someone who performs miracles and speaks in powerful words but the poor Christ: without possessions, naked in the manger and naked on the Cross. Francis sees the world, humankind and God from this point of view. He does not need the interpretation of theologians in order to discover the Christ of the Gospels.



*Francis gives his garment to a poor knight.*

There are several stories about Francis' sense of justice and his solidarity with the poor. The following is one of them:

*When Francis was returning from Siena, he met a certain poor man and said to his companion: 'Brother, we must give back to this poor man the mantle that is his. We accepted it on loan until we should happen to find someone poorer than we are.' The companion, seeing the need of his pious father, stubbornly objected*

With this attitude, conflict with the church is unavoidable. The tension with the radically understood Gospel and the ecclesiastical institution is not sustained in many poverty movements in the middle ages and leads time and time again to a break with the church. Francis avoids this by requesting a cardinal protector<sup>8</sup> to protect his brothers from external and internal dangers (cf. LR 12:3). The brothers beg, not as an exercise of humility, but out of necessity. Begging is a consequence of their option to be poor and small. The poor and small ones experience that their salary is withheld. This is expressed in Francis' Testament: "And when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, asking alms from door to door (Test 22).

In the hermitages, Francis wanted that the brothers, in solidarity with the poor, beg food from their own brothers (cf. RH 5).

Francis turned the humiliating experience of having to beg into something positive by indicating that Christ and Mary were poor themselves and experienced the same fate (cf. ER 9:5).

<sup>8</sup> a Cardinal appointed by the church to take care of Order matters.



• *Her Relationship with the Poor Christ*

Like Francis, Clare follows the Gospel. Her attitude is one of deep amazement, admiring silence, and empathy as she meditates on the truth of God's awesome revelation of himself. God becomes human, flesh and poor. This is the essence of the Franciscan-Clarean charism. Clare writes to Agnes of Prague:

*Gaze upon that mirror each day, O Queen and Spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually study your face within it, that you may adorn yourself within and without with beautiful robes, and cover yourself with the flowers and garments of all the virtues, as becomes the daughter and most chaste bride of the Most High King. Indeed, blessed poverty, holy humility, and ineffable charity are reflected in that mirror, as, with the grace of God, you can contemplate them throughout the entire mirror.*

*Look at the border of this mirror, that is, the poverty of Him Who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. O marvellous humility, O astonishing poverty! The King of the angels, the Lord of heaven and earth, is laid in a manger!*

*Then, at the surface of the mirror, dwell on the holy humility, the blessed poverty, the untold labours and burdens which He endured for the redemption of the whole human race. Then, in the depths of this same mirror, contemplate the ineffable charity which led Him to suffer on the wood of the Cross and die thereon the most shameful kind of death.*

*Therefore, that Mirror, suspended on the wood of the Cross, urged those who passed by to consider, saying 'All you who pass by the way, look and see if there is any suffering like My suffering!'*

*Let us answer Him with one voice and spirit, as He said: Remembering this over and over leaves my soul downcast within me (4LAg 15-26).*

These phrases remind us of Francis' Christmas devotion. Clare made "the teachings of Francis her own" for after God he was her sole consolation and spiritual guide. She placed in her Rule Francis' last will for her and her sisters:

*I, brother Francis, the little one, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy mother and to persevere in this until*



*Saint Agnes of Prague.*

*the end; and I ask and counsel you, my ladies, to live always in this most holy life and in poverty. And keep most careful watch that you never depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone (RCI 6:3).*

In her own words Clare speaks of Francis' eagerness to have his followers persevere in the life and poverty of the Lord Jesus Christ: "so that we may never turn aside from the most holy poverty we have embraced [nor those, either, who would come after us....]" (RCI 6:3)

Clare lives poverty for one single reason: she discovered that Jesus Christ loves poverty. Clare does not promote a theology of virtues because



her religion is not anchored in abstract teachings, but essentially in a living relationship. For her, love and poverty are one — Jesus Christ, the poor and crucified. Christ is “Holy Poverty”. Clare invites us to look at Jesus with faith and love, to discover in Him the perfect example of perfection and to follow Him.

To Clare poverty is real, fundamental and anchored in life. With her sisters she places herself on the level of poor people. For her, this means hard work, insecurity, deprivation, humiliation, but also freedom and inner fulfilment.

### • *The Privilege of Poverty*

With a firm will to remain poor, Clare’s ultimate aim was to obtain the church’s approval of her request for a life without material possessions and for the privilege to live without privileges. In this regard her sisters feared that they themselves might falter or be forced by external pressure to give up their life of absolute poverty. In her biography we read:

*Since she wanted her religious family to gain the title of poverty, she petitioned Innocent III for the privilege of poverty. Delighted by the virgin’s great devotion, this wonderful man took note of the uniqueness of her proposal, since a privilege of this sort had never been requested before at the Holy See. In order to ensure that such an unusual petition would be smiled upon by unusual favour, it was with great joy that the Pope himself wrote the draft of the requested privilege (LegCl 14).*

Pope Innocent III, politically the most powerful pope in history, understood that for Francis and Clare the renunciation of all possessions was an essential element in the following of Christ.

In 1228 Clare requested a confirmation of the privilege of poverty from Pope Gregory IX:

*A man who was not only very worthy of the papal chair, but was also respected through personal merits, dearly loved the saint like a father. Although he tried to persuade her to agree to own some property and to offer it to her himself, Clare very courageously objected and refused to consent to this. Hence, the Pontiff said to her, ‘We will absolve you of your vow if that is what you are afraid of’. She replied, ‘Holy Father, on no account do I wish to be dispensed from following Christ!’ (LegCl 14)*



Clare receives the “Privilege of Poverty”.

We are facing a conflict here: two persons contradict each other. Clare cannot deny what God has kindled in her, what He demands and expects from her. The Pope represents reason and the necessary legal and material security of a community. Here is a tension between equating the Gospel with poverty by Clare on one hand, and the church’s traditional understanding of what following Christ means, on the other hand. But even the highest authority of the Pope is not able to silence the voice in Clare’s heart.

This struggle with the Pope continued until Clare’s death. In 1230 Clare went on a hunger strike in order to revoke a papal order. In 1235 she found, in Agnes of Prague, somebody to fight with her. They put up a stubborn insistence for





the sake of their own charism. Finally, Clare wrote her own rule that included the provision on total renunciation of possessions. In 1253, a few days before her death, Pope Innocent IV approved her Rule and, thus, submitted to Clare's will.

The poverty of Clare leads to freedom. "How blest are the poor in spirit, the reign of God is theirs" (Mt 5:3). These words echo the fulfilment received by those who possess nothing and those who un-

derstand the truth about the Reign of Jesus: peace and joy. In a letter to Agnes of Prague, Clare shares her conviction:

*You know, I am sure, that the kingdom of heaven is promised and given by the Lord only to the poor, for those who love temporal things lose the fruit of love. Such a person cannot serve God and Mammon, for either the one is loved and the other hated, or the one is served and the other despised (1LAg 25f).*

## The Franciscan Movement: From the Poor to Poverty!

2.4.

Francis, who seeks complete solidarity with the poor, seldom speaks about the virtue of *poverty*. Clare, on the other hand, who encounters the poor less frequently in her situation, often uses the abstract term *poverty*. With her one gets the impression that she moves from the poor to poverty of which she makes a kind of person. Hence, she addresses poverty with admiration, "O holy poverty!" Poverty is meditated on, sung, glorified, and exalted to the heavens.

spiritual building in which poverty serves as the keystone. The foundations are fraternal love and contemplative love for God, and on these are built humility and patience, and then virginity and silence. Everything, however, is held together by poverty (cf. 1C 19).

In his second biography, Thomas of Celano puts these words in Francis' mouth:

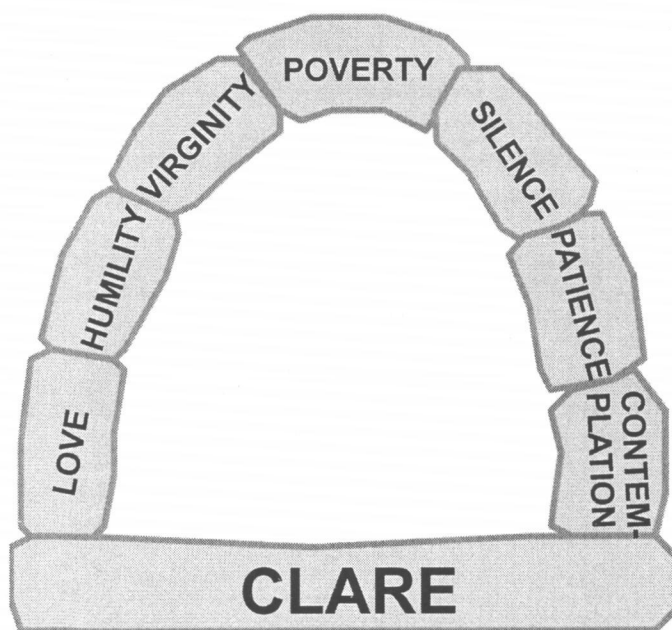
*The Lord is well pleased with poverty, and above all with that poverty that is voluntary. But I have the royal dignity and special nobility, namely to follow the Lord who, being rich, became poor for us (2C 73).*

Gradually, however, poverty became exalted as an ideal and eventually had nothing to do anymore with the poverty of the destitute poor.

This does not yet apply to Thomas of Celano. For him poverty remains as concrete as it is radical. The poverty of Francis even becomes an occasion to strongly criticise the clerics and the church:

*Why do you pant after revenues, modern cleric? Tomorrow you will know that Francis was rich, when you will find in your hand the revenues of torments (2C 84).*

Such statements reveal more incidentally than directly the beginning of a conflict with the church. The secular clergy would experience more and more that their churches remain empty while the people throng to the church services of the mendicant Orders. This was



This development is also seen in Thomas of Celano. In his description of their community, while Clare was still alive in 1228, he speaks of a



mainly due to the latter's closeness to the lower classes. This resulted in envy and jealousy and consequently in a grave conflict between the mendicant Orders and the clerics of the church.

Before this situation can be dealt with more closely, another event must be considered. In the 12th century Joachim of Fiore had a great vision: he sees the era of the Holy Spirit as being imminent: a church that is poor and deeply rooted in God, a contemplative church of the poor. According to Joachim, this church will be manifested by the emergence of two new Orders.

In the years during which Thomas of Celano published Francis' second biography, some Franciscans and Dominicans began to refer the vision of Joachim to themselves. With their radical poverty and their contemplative way of life, they felt like prophets of the new church. One of them, Brother Gerhard of Borgo San Donnino, writes a book entitled: The "*Eternal Gospel*" in which he disseminated, and partly distorted, the teachings of Joachim of Fiore. The book, which was well received, was immediately condemned by the Church as dangerous and consigned to the flames.

With such ideas the mendicant Orders were brought all the more into the firing range of the clergy. A virus spreads in the Franciscan and Dominican communities, that would affect them for centuries. The spokesmen of the clergy, theology professors at the University of Paris, brought out the sharpest weapon available to them: the weight of twelve hundred years of tradition and the current Canon Law. They proved that the mendicant Orders had no legal foundation in the church at all. Possessions were believed to be not only an absolute necessity for every community but also an actual requirement to allow the practice of the profession of a pastor. Since the Franciscans and Dominicans have no benefice, therefore no secure existence, they were not allowed to administer the sacraments, to preach, or to celebrate the Eucharist. The professors claimed that this violated the whole legal and religious tradition of the church. The professors were right from the standpoint of the

Canon Law then in force. They could not but take their stance from the official doctrine as generally binding.

In reality, at least the communities following Francis and Clare rested on a weak legal foundation; they could only exist because of a papal privilege. But also the pastoral work, around which the whole controversy revolved, was an area that the secular clergy was exclusively entitled to. Only in exceptional cases were members of the Orders included in pastoral work, and that for a limited time and for clearly defined tasks. In this violent controversy, otherwise known as the "Paris mendicant order controversy", the greatest theologians at that time took the side of the new Orders: Thomas of Aquinas, Bonaventure, John Pecham and many others joined in. They wrote books in "defence of the poor", i.e. the new Orders that embraced poverty as their way of life. They wrote these books, and books with similar themes, in a short period of time. Besides this, Bonaventure wrote a new biography of St. Francis, to stem the influence of Joachim of Fiore in the Order and to save the Franciscan Order as a church community. The legal controversy with the secular clergy was decided in favour of the mendicant Orders, and this was achieved not by means of strong arguments but by the decisive word of the Pope: this *novelty*, this really new link between poverty and pastoral work that had never existed before, contradicted neither the Gospel nor the religious tradition of the Church; he the Pope, had absolute power to entrust pastoral work to anyone as he wished. And so he ordered that all the books of the Parisian professors were to be burnt. By the way, the theologians from the mendicant Orders thanked the Pope for it by theologially justifying and strengthening his "Universal Primacy"<sup>9</sup>.

A by-product of this theological controversy was the increasing emphasis on poverty. It became more and more a central theme of theology, as the first and the most important virtue in a whole system of virtues. As time went on poverty became a kind of *person*. "The mystical covenant

<sup>9</sup> The exclusive authority of the Pope as representative of God on earth.





Francis is betrothed to Lady Poverty by Christ.

of Francis with Lady Poverty", the *Sacrum Commercium*, finds its place here. For a long time this great work had been dated already to the years immediately following the death of Francis. It is, however, much more probable that it had its proper setting in the above-mentioned argument with the secular clergy. The author is a great theologian, probably John Pecham. The title itself contains a whole theology: Poverty is a *Lady*, a high-ranking lady admired by Francis and with whom he made a covenant. However, this covenant, as the title shows, is not to be interpreted as a marriage union but as a "covenant of salvation." Poverty is not his bride, but the bride of Jesus Christ, the Lord. It has also been said that "Lady Poverty" is "the female image of Jesus".

The work tells the story of Francis and his companions. They climb a high mountain. Up there Lady Poverty awaits them at her banquet to make an eternal covenant of salvation with them. Beforehand, however, Poverty tells her life story from the time of Adam and Eve until the time of Francis. When Adam and Eve were still naked, Poverty was with humankind. Nothing would have come between the people and God. As a complete reliance on God poverty was a characteristic of the human race. But they betrayed and destroyed their intimate relationship

with God. They had to wear clothes. Since then poverty has been despised and forgotten until Jesus welcomed and *married* her. In his nakedness the crucified Jesus restored the human person's union with God and referred everything back to God. From then on poverty became indispensable for salvation: without poverty there is no salvation! Without poverty the human person cannot be united with God or Jesus. "Lady Poverty" further said that she had soon been forgotten until this moment when Francis and his Brothers came to renew the covenant of salvation.

This mystical relationship with "Lady Poverty" was later expressed in another form. This *Lady* becomes the *bride* whom Francis weds. In this context, let us pay attention to the painting made by Giotto's pupil, Maestro delle Vele, in the lower church of the Basilica of Francis. This painting shows Francis as married to his bride, who is depicted wearing a shabby dress. Stones are thrown at her; she is despised, but behind her stands Jesus Christ as the priest officiating the marriage rites, who blesses the union for life. In spite of its impressiveness, this painting does not come near the *Sacrum Commercium* that shows Poverty as a Lady.

The *Sacrum Commercium* is a great literary work and is superior in its intellectual achievement. Its superiority lies in the *personification* of poverty, but a fateful development is linked to it and we still suffer from its consequences today. We talk so much about poverty, yet we forget what it means in actual life. We build an entire edifice of ideas, concern ourselves with wonderful theories, and yet keep ourselves at a distance from those people for whom poverty means misery and destitution. It is not surprising that within the Franciscan movement, again and again, brothers and sisters stand up and insist on being poor among the poor as was the original intention. The Franciscan movement undergoes one reform after another





and has to go through severe testing again and again so that the poor themselves should not be lost sight of among *nice* theories.

In the beginning of the 15th century, there was again a strong controversy with the Church. The Franciscans made a legal distinction between two terms: "to possess" and "to make use of": One can make simple use of many things without possessing them in the legal sense. From a legal point of view this differentiation is correct, but in practical life there lurks the danger of betraying the poverty of the poor. People amass houses, books, things and have everything at their disposal without really possessing anything. They only use things. Dishonesty triumphs!

On the other side was the Church that understood herself as a possessor of many goods. The Church was rich. This was the reason why the Franciscans criticised the Church. They claimed that the imperative of having no possessions was not for Christ alone, but for the Church as well. Jesus himself is said to have no *dominium*, that is, no property. But the Church could not accept

this criticism, for that would mean the end of the Church as an institution. As a result, the Pope condemned this Franciscan view on Jesus and the Church. After this papal decision, the Franciscans themselves were no longer allowed to use indiscriminately this distinction between *use* and *ownership*. Once again we see how an ideal can turn into an ideology and moves away from the poverty of the poor.

Nevertheless we may hold on to the fact that Francis and Clare regarded absolute lack of possessions as the essence of their way of life. Francis saw in the acquisition of property the basic evil of human history, the sin that has come down to succeeding generations since the time of Adam and Eve. The salvation and the redemption of the world lay in the *expropriation*, in renouncing every behaviour that is influenced by the desire to have, possess and acquire (cf. Adm 2). The people who joined Francis and Clare were not allowed to appropriate anything and should not regard themselves as owners.



## Perspectives in Summary

3.

### The Social Standpoint

3.1.

According to Francis one acquires a new vision of the Gospel when one changes one's social position. All things, one's entire life, appear in a new light. The meeting with the leper is a turning point for Francis. His view of the world from the point of view of those who are "great and extraordinary in the sight of God" (1LtCus 1-2) changes in favour of those who are despised, insignificant and

small among people. Francis points to a fundamental fact: Your social position is decisive for the interpretation of reality.

*One of the most important questions asked by historians with regard to historical accounts of witnesses, is the social position of the witness. History is read, interpreted and written by people who are educated and who possess money and power. It is the same thing*





with texts about poverty; it is the rich who write about it. In the writings of the middle ages, the theme poverty frequently appears. These were written by clerics. The clergy, however, did not form a homogenous social class. That is why it is important to know who the authors of the texts were, their social position in the Church and society and their intellectual orientation and objectives (J.C. Schmitt).

Franciscan reflection on a particular theme, whether its content is theological, spiritual, economic, political or even mystical, means thinking and behaving from the point of view of the loser. In this Franciscan way of thinking, another form of behaviour and historiography<sup>1</sup> is demanded. We must think from below, from the point of view of the enslaved creature, of the poor and the small; they are the people favoured by Jesus.



## Justice

3.2.

Francis brings his attitude towards poverty to bear in relation to justice. The Franciscan movement wants to be involved in the option of God: the world, the society, the church, the economy, everything should be adapted to the original

plan of God. Whoever relies on divine justice creates a network of relationships in which the harmonious balance desired by God is restored (cf. 2C 87). (See further comments in Lesson 23: Commitment to Peace).

## The View of the Poor

3.3.

The Franciscan movement moves the centre of society to its periphery. Its centre must not be where the centres of power are. This applies to all levels: global, national and local, to a city and the district of a city. Francis and his brothers judged and acted from the experience of the marginalized, (those living on the margin of so-

ciety) on one hand, and from the perspective of the Gospel on the other. For that was the new society in which they lived. For this reason, Franciscan action needs neither money nor power to make the world a better place to live in. (See further comments in Lesson 20: Liberation Theology).

<sup>1</sup> the writing of history books.



## A New Economic Order

3.4.

The above-mentioned conflict between the Franciscans and the Church bears a fundamental significance. *Dominium* (for possession), which is the issue under discussion, provides for the absolute right by the owner of the disposition of his/her property. In view of the present economic order, this theory and practice on property ownership must be more closely scru-

tinised. It must be reconsidered from the perspective of those who are at the bottom of the social scale in order to build a new economic structure. For example, it is not just a matter of giving up possessions, but redefining them. If we want to maintain life on our planet, we must give up the traditional view of ownership (See further comments in Lesson 21).

## A New Exercise of Power

3.5.

The themes *property* and *power* are inseparably linked to each other. The terms *freedom*, *spirit*, "respect for the individual", *fraternity*, are very important subject matter to Franciscans. But more important and central is *poverty* (= "not possessing anything"). This, or rather the new definition of ownership, whose elements are not power but responsibility and care, must be the

main element of the Franciscan message to the modern democracies. Only then can we speak of freedom, of participation, of common leadership..., therefore of a real democracy, if we rise above the prevailing view on ownership. (See further comments in Lesson 21: Prophetic Criticism of Systems).

### Church Documents and Franciscan Sources

Scripture	Dt 15:11; Ps 72:13 ff.; Jer 17:5; Mt 5:12; 11:25; 26:11; Mk 14:7; Lk 4:16-22; Jn 10:11-21; 12:8; Phil 2:6 ff.
Documents of the Church	GS 63; SRS 16; SD 17.
Franciscan Sources	2LIF 75-85; 1 & 2 LtCust; ER 9:3; FormLife 14; Test 22; Last Will 1 ff.; 2C 73; 84f; 87; 1LAg 4; 4LAg 15-24; RCI VI:3.
Inter-Franciscan Documents	
OFM	
OFMCap	
OFMConv	
Order of Poor Clares	
Third Order Regular	
Third Order Secular	
Supplements	

*Note: course participants may provide additional source materials.*



# Exercises



# 1



Exercise



## Read Chapter 9 of the Rule of 1221: On Begging Alms

1. All the brothers should strive to follow the humility and the poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ and remember that we should have nothing else in the whole world except, as the Apostle says, *having something to eat and something to wear, we be content with these* (cf. 1 Tim 6:8).
2. And they must rejoice when they live among people [who are considered to be] of little worth and who are looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the wayside.
3. And when it may be necessary, let them go for alms.
4. And they should not be ashamed, but rather recall that our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Son of the living and all-powerful God* (cf. Jn 11:27), *set His face like flint* (Is 50:7) *and was not ashamed*.
5. And He was a poor man and a transient and lived on alms, He and the Blessed Virgin, and His disciples.
6. And should people shame them and refuse to give them alms, let them give thanks to God for this, since from such insults they will receive great honour before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.
7. And let them know that such shame is credited not to those who suffer it but to those who caused it.
8. And alms are a legacy and a just right due to the poor, which our Lord Jesus Christ acquired for us.
9. And the brothers who labour to acquire them will receive a great reward and [at the same time] enable those who give [such alms] to gain and acquire [that reward] in return, for everything that people leave behind in the world will perish, but for the charity and the almsgiving which they have done they will receive a reward from the Lord.
10. And each one should confidently make known his need to the other, so that he might find what he needs and minister it to him.
11. And each one should love and care for his brother in all those things in which God will give him grace, as a mother loves and cares for her son (cf. 1 Thes 2:7).
12. *And he who does not eat should not judge the one who does* (Rom 14:3b).
13. And whenever necessity should come upon them all the brothers, wherever they may be, may eat all foods which people can eat, as the Lord says of David who ate *the loaves of proposition* (cf. Mt 12:4) *which no one was permitted to eat except the priests* (Mk 2:26).
14. And let them recall what the Lord says: *Be on your guard that your hearts do not become bloated with self-indulgence and drunkenness and the cares of this life, for that day will come upon you unexpectedly;*



15. *for like a trap it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the earth (Lk 21:34-35).*
16. Likewise, even in times of manifest necessity, all the brothers should take care of their needs, as the Lord gives them the grace, since "necessity knows no law."

### Questions:

1. In what way does Francis relate Jesus Christ to the poor?
2. What conclusions does Francis draw for himself and his community?
3. How does Francis try to cope with human need?
4. What do you understand by the word *alms*, and what views does Francis attach to it?



### Exercise

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Church dealt for the first time with the theme of poverty, with the notion of 'a poor Church' and 'a Church of the Poor.'

**Read the following commentary by Mario von Galli, SJ:**

"Now I come to a theme of the Council that is intimately linked up with the name of the 'Poverello of Assisi.' It deals with poverty in the Church, with the poor Church, the Church of the poor. Although the three phrases do not express the same idea, they were nevertheless used by the Fathers of the Council rather loosely, as if they were synonymous. The topic was presented right at the beginning of the Council, when it was much discussed. Then a small but universally representative group of bishops and experts took over and concentrated on it, while the great majority got involved in other disputes on systematic theology and ecclesiastical structures. However, finally, towards the end of the Council the idea of poverty and its significance reasserted itself again (von Galli, p. 108). ... As an example I quote an intervention that Bishop Juan Iriarte (51), of the Diocese of Reconquista, Argentina made during the third Session of the Council on September 24, 1964 when the reform of the episcopal office was being discussed. He said:

*I beseech my Brothers to adapt themselves to the modern world. Up to now we have been feudal bishops, but now we must become bishops of the atomic age. The characteristics of the modern world are socialisation, urbanisation, plurality of cultures... These demand of us bishops, in the first place, a new style of life. The bishop must spend time and efforts on getting acquainted with the world in which he lives.*

*He must free himself, so as to be able to talk with his priests, with the lay-people of his diocese and non-Catholics. Therefore, he should no longer waste his time in second-rate activities, like the consecration of bells and so on. He must learn the language of the common people of today. Even the way of expressing himself must be changed and become simpler. His authority must be exercised differently. It is he who should take the initiative to enter into a dialogue with his priests and lay-people. He must become aware that he is exercising his authority over adult people, who have a clear sense of their own responsibility.*

*He has to attribute great importance to poverty, not by means of theatrical gestures, but by introducing a new life-style into the Church. The bishop of today may not have anything theatrical about him. He must appear very simple, just like John XXIII.*

At this point Bishop Iriarte was abruptly interrupted by the Moderator of the session who said there was no time for dealing with such unsuit-

2.





able attacks! Well, how the bishop's speech would have gone on, if he had had the time, can be deduced from an article he had published in *'Le Monde'* (1 June 1963), a good year earlier. Here is an extract from this article:

*'Blessed be the poor.' I think of the poverty and the external simplicity of the Church as a precondition for the proclamation of the Gospel. The Good News of the Church was, is, and will be a message of peace, truth, love, hope and the spirit of service. But I also remember how difficult it is for us 'bishops of the poor' of Christ's Church in the 20th century to pass on this Gospel, which, at its beginnings, was steeped in the poverty of the incarnation, the Crib and the Cross. It was proclaimed by a carpenter's son, who did not even have a place to rest his head, who washed the feet of those he called his friends, who used the simplest language of colloquial speech in his parables, e.g. the story of the lost drachma. His message today is directed at people living under the stern conditions of a proletarian life, people of whom 65 percent are suffering from hunger, if not famine. Many of them live in shanty towns, favelas, slums. They call each other 'comrades' and are accustomed to the vigorous and blunt speeches of their party leaders, to the clear-cut lines of their housing blocks and to the stark uniforms of the military.*

*But we, the people who have to spread the Gospel, proclaim it while looking down from the marble heights of our altars and our episcopal 'palaces', appearing in the incomprehensible 'baroque' of our Solemn High Masses, bearing our waving and weaving mitres, so alien to the people, and using the even more alienating euphemisms of our ecclesiastical language. Moreover, we strut along, clad in purple, in front of our people, we use the latest models in our motorcars, or we travel first-class. The people have to address us as 'Your Eminence,' 'Your Grace', they genuflect before us and kiss the episcopal ring on our hands.*

*It is not easy to free oneself from this dead-weight of the burden of history and traditional usage. Woe to the 'simplifiers,' who find this all quite easy to give up! Let us be on our guard, so as to avoid sweeping condemnations as well as opportunistic solutions.*

*O Lord, in humility, poverty, simplicity of heart and under the protection of Your Mother, we ask you to grant us the fullness of life and the necessary courage, so that the Church may find its way in our time, becoming ca-*

*pable of very simply building a Church according to the ideal envisaged by Your Servant John, namely the Church of the Poor.*

No, such a reform as this had not been foreseen at the Council. The idea had something unsettling, frightening about it to most of the bishops, especially because it presented reality in such a plain and concrete fashion. There were no yardsticks that could be referred to. It would be a great mistake indeed to believe that these 'bishops of the poor' were abnormal 'pseudo mystics'. Certainly, some of the suggestions made during the initial months had a touch of exaggeration, of excess. It was not to be expected that all the bishops would immediately be ready to exchange their valuable pectoral crosses for simple wooden ones, or to give up their rings, as the Eastern Church did, using plain and simple ones instead. Anyway, what value would such symbolic acts have if they were mandatory? Some critical comments could be silenced, perhaps. But the true renewal of the Church can only be achieved on the basis of free will, and as the sign of an inner attitude of mind. Bishop Iriarte himself did not omit to warn people against the *simplifiers*. But even so the startled Moderator did not let him continue, for fear of being faced with too much reality. And the Press, and that too must be mentioned, omitted the clinching final section of his article. Even *'Le Monde'* cannot be spared this reproach (von Galli, pp. 112-114).

#### Questions:

1. Is the idea of a poor Church a utopian one or is it a concept that can be put into practice?
2. Which structures will such a Church of the poor have to give up and which structures should it support?





## Exercise

Read the following text from the concluding document of the Fourth General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops in Sto. Domingo, Oct. 12-28, 1992:

### *Pastoral guidelines:*

#### No. 180

- Assume with renewed decision the gospel-inspired and preferential option for the poor, following the example and the words of the Lord Jesus, with full trust in God, austerity of life and sharing goods..
- Give priority to providing fraternal service to the poorest among the poor and helping institutions that take care of them: the handicapped, the sick, old people who are alone, abandoned children, prisoners, people with AIDS, and all those who need the merciful approach of the "good Samaritan."
- Examine personal and community attitudes and behaviours, along with pastoral structures and methods, so that rather than alienating the poor they may facilitate closeness and sharing with them.

3.



- Foster social involvement vis-à-vis the state by demanding laws to defend the rights of the poor

#### No. 181

- Make our parishes a space for solidarity.
- Support and encourage those organisations for economic solidarity with which our people are trying to respond to their desperate situations of poverty.
- Press governments to respond to the hardships that are being worsened by the neoliberal economic model whose primary impact is on the poor. When considering these situations, it is important to single out the millions in the developing world who are struggling to survive in the informal economy.

#### Questions:

1. Do you know of similar texts from the announcements of the bishops or Bishops' Conference in your region?
2. To what extent do these texts influence the life and work of your community and of the Franciscan family in your place?



## Exercise

Read the following texts: From the Declaration of the 5th Plenary Assembly of the Association of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC), July 1990:

4.



### *B. The Challenge of Continuing Injustice*

We are deeply conscious, therefore, that within our context of change there is the unchanging



reality of injustice. There remains in Asia massive poverty. Hundreds of millions of people are excluded from access to natural resources. Exploitation of the environment destroys precious resources and thus destroys the material and spiritual habitat of many of our peoples. Militarization involves the wasting of scarce resources on armies and armaments rather than the using of these resources to meet genuine and pressing human needs. Traditional patterns of discrimination against women continue in force. In situations of poverty and injustice it is usually women who suffer most. We see this in the flourishing of exploitative tourism, where women and children are driven into prostitution — this is both a matter of sexual morality and also a matter of structural injustice. Poverty likewise drives both men and women to become migrant workers, often destroying family life in the process. Political conflict and economic desperation have driven millions to become refugees, to living for years in camps that are sometimes in effect crowded prisons. Within many Asian societies, graft and corruption remain a source of serious injustice.

Asia is home to vast numbers of young people. But too many of them face a future of unemployment and consequent frustration. The most basic and fundamental human right to life is denied to the unborn child by the practice of abortion. Child labour (even bonded labour) is still prevalent. Our youth, who are 60% of the Asian population, tend to be influenced by an education, the media and social pressures which perpetuate this reality of injustice, and youth themselves are often victims.

Connected too with these injustices are other violations of human rights. We see forms of cultural imperialism, with the imposition of majority values, or of values of an assertive minority on the rest of society. Access to education and employment is denied or limited on the basis of religion, caste, political stance, economic status, or ethnic origin. Those in these societies and elsewhere who speak and act in the name of justice are subject to imprisonment and other forms of punishment. All of these injustices are interconnected. Taken together, they amount to a crisis of survival.

**From the Post Synod Apostolic writing *Ecclesia in Africa* of Pope John Paul II., September 1995:**

### *Becoming the Voice of the Voiceless*

70. Strengthened by faith and hope in the saving power of Jesus, the Synod Fathers concluded their work by renewing their commitment to accept the challenge of being instruments of salvation in every area of the life of the peoples of Africa. "The Church," they declared, "must continue to exercise her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless", so that everywhere the human dignity of every individual will be acknowledged, and that people will always be at the centre of all government programmes. The Synod "challenges the consciences of Heads of State and those responsible for the public domain to guarantee ever more the liberation and development of their peoples". Only at this price is peace established between nations.

Evangelization must promote initiatives which contribute to the development and ennoblement of individuals in their spiritual and material existence. This involves the development of every person and of the whole person, considered not only individually but also and especially in the context of common and harmonious development of all the members of a nation and of all the peoples of the world.

Finally, evangelization must denounce and combat all that degrades and destroys the person. "The condemnation of evils and injustices is also part of that *ministry of evangelization* in the social field which is an aspect of the Church's *prophetic role*. But it should be made clear that proclamation is always more important than condemnation, and the latter cannot ignore the former, which gives it true solidity and the force of higher motivation".

### *Ecclesial Dimension of Witness*

106. The Synod Fathers drew attention to the ecclesial dimension of this witness and solemnly declared: "The Church must continue to play her prophetic role and be the voice of the voiceless". But to achieve this effectively, the Church, as a community of faith must be an energetic witness to justice and peace in her structures and in the relationship among her members. The





*Message of the Synod* courageously states: "The Churches in Africa are also aware that, insofar as their own internal affairs are concerned, justice is not always respected with regard to those men and women who are at their service. If the Church is to give witness to justice, she recognises that whoever dares to speak to others about justice should also strive to be just in their eyes. It is necessary therefore to examine with care the procedures, the possessions and the life style of the Church".

In what concerns the promotion of justice and specially the defence of fundamental human rights, the Church's apostolate cannot be improvised. Aware that in many African countries gross violations of human dignity and rights are being perpetrated, I ask the Episcopal Conference to establish, where they do not yet exist, Justice and Peace Commissions at various levels. These will awaken Christian communities to their evangelical responsibilities in the defence of human rights.

107. If the proclamation of justice and peace is an integral part of the task of evangelization, it follows that the promotion of these values should also be a part of the pastoral programme of each Christian community. That is why I urge that all pastoral agents are to be adequately trained for this apostolate. "The formation of clergy, religious and laity, imparted in the areas of their apostolate, should lay emphasis on the social teaching of the Church. Each person, according to his state of life, should be specially trained to know his rights and duties, the meaning and service of the common good, honest management of public goods and the proper manner of participating in political life, in order

to be able to act in a credible manner in the face of social injustices".

As a body organised within the community and the nation, the Church has both the right and the duty to participate fully in building a just and peaceful society with all the means at her disposal. Here we must mention the Church's apostolate in the areas of education, health care, social awareness and in other programmes of assistance. In the measure that these activities help to reduce ignorance, improve public health and promote a greater participation of all in solving the problems of society in a spirit of freedom and co-responsibility, the Church creates conditions for the progress of justice and peace.

#### Questions and Tasks:

1. Name concrete examples of injustice in your environment.
2. What efforts does your local church make to be the voice of the voiceless?
3. What steps can you take, alone or with others, to promote justice and especially the defence of the fundamental human rights?
4. What solidarity may and can Asians, Africans or Latin Americans expect from Franciscans in other countries or regions?
5. Which networks should be organised?
6. What kind of networks do already exist in your region?
7. How do we react to them as a local community?
8. How can we make use of the international Franciscan community in concrete cases?





## Exercise

5.

The satirical parable of the rich man is rarely mentioned. It shows us something of St. Francis' keen sense of justice. In his 'Letter to the Faithful' he speaks about a rich man who in the face of death shows no repentance about not having paid his debts.

*Certainly, that man is cursed who confides and entrusts his soul and body and all his possessions into such hands; for, as the Lord says through the prophet, Cursed is the man who confides in man (Jer 17:5). And immediately they summon the priest to come. The priest says to him: "Do you wish to receive pardon for all your sins?" He responds: "I do." "Do you wish to make restitution as far as you can from your substance for all that you have done and for the ways [in which] you have defrauded and deceived people?" He responds: "No." And the priest asks: "Why not?" "Because I have placed everything in the hands of relatives and friends." And he begins to lose the power of speech and thus that miserable man dies.*

*But let everyone know that whenever or however a person dies in mortal sin without making amends*

*when he could have done so and did not, the devil snatches up his soul out of his body with so much anguish and tribulation that no one can know it unless he has experienced it. And every talent and power and knowledge which he thinks he possesses (cf. Lk 8:18) will be taken away from him (Mk 4:25). And [whatever] he leaves his relatives and friends they will snatch up and divide among themselves. And afterwards they will say: "May his soul be cursed since he could have acquired more and given us more than he did." Worms eat [his] body. And so he loses body and soul in this brief life, and will go down to hell where he will be tormented without end (2LtF 75-85).*

### Questions:

1. What does Francis want to say with this parable?
2. What understanding of property is expressed in this text?



# Applications

E



Application

## Questions:

1. What new kind of poverty on the social, political, economic, cultural, health,... etc. level exists in your area today?
2. What actions are already taking place in the Franciscan family in your region?
3. What actions would be possible and desirable for the Franciscan family in your region or in your community?



Application

2.

Meditate on the following statements:

**From the era of the Fathers of the Church (St. Basil the Great):**

*The hungry own the bread that grows stale in your house.*

*The needy own the shoes that grow mouldy underneath your bed.*

*The naked own the clothes that hang in your closet.*

*The poor own the money that loses its worth in your wallet.*

**Poverty in the First World (Christopher William Jones):**

*Be not afraid of HIM! He is an old woman, wrinkled and filthy, and reeks of wine.*

*He wears a tattered coat, and a handbag made of scrap and he smokes a rolled-up cigarette.*

*Do not be afraid of HIS language! Do not be afraid of HIS appearance! Do not be afraid of His stench! He is your God!*

**Possession among the American Indians (From the picture series: "Indians speaking"):**

When the missionaries came,  
we had the land and they the Bible.  
Today we have the Bible and they the land.

## Tasks:

1. Reflect on these statements and face their provocation.
2. Compare them with Matthew 25:31-46.





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# Picture credits



## **P**icture credits

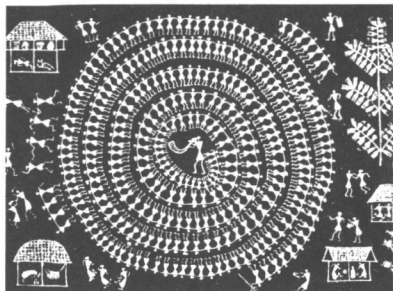
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- P. 15: **Top:** Mosaic of the Kariye Djami, Istanbul. 14th century.  
**Bottom:** Sarcophagus, Rome, about 270 AD.
- P. 16: Drawing from Latin America.
- P. 17: Detail from "The Last Judgement". A. Orcagna, Florence, Italy.
- P. 19: Miniature from the codex "Legenda Major" of the 15th century. Franciscan Museum, Rome.
- P. 20: Statue of the Ludmila-Tumba, Prague.
- P. 21: Drawing from the Renaissance.
- P. 24: Fresco by the "Maestro delle Vele", a student of Giotto, about 1315, in the lower church of San Francesco, Assisi.
- P. 39: Daily Nation (Kenya), March 8, 2002.



# Structure of The CCFMC



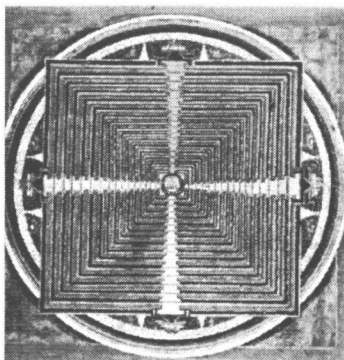
(25 Lessons in the whole Course)



## 0. Introduction and Survey

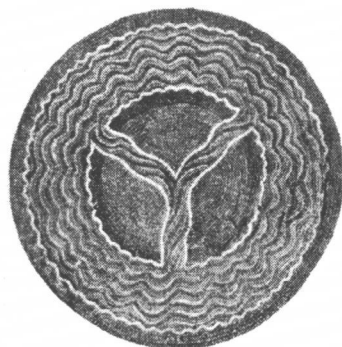
### A. The Franciscan Family: Bearer of a Specific Mission

1. Christianity – a Religion of the Incarnation
2. The Franciscan Family
3. Franciscan Collaboration Today
4. Initial and Ongoing Formation



### B. The Foundation of the Franciscan Mission Charism

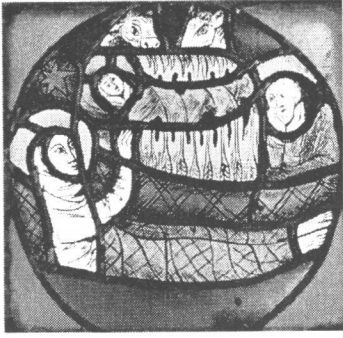
5. Biblical and Prophetic Basis of the Franciscan Mission
6. The Origin of Mission in the Mystery of the Trinity
7. The Franciscan Mission according to Early Sources
8. Loyalty and Betrayal: a History of Franciscan Mission
9. Franciscan Mission according to Modern Sources



### C. The Religious–Mystical Dimension of the Franciscan Mission Charism

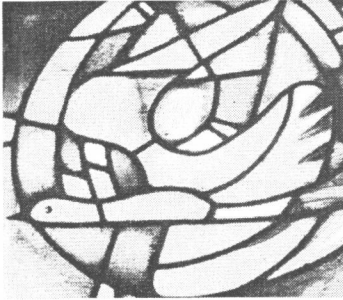
10. The Unity of Contemplation and Mission
11. The Option for Christ and Universality
12. Being Brothers and Sisters to all:  
Reconciliation with God, Humanity and Nature
13. Franciscan Mission and the Preaching of the Word
14. Sisters and Brothers in a Secularized World
15. Dialogue with Other Religions: A Franciscan Way
16. Encounter with the Muslims
17. Inculturation as a Franciscan Task
18. The Franciscan Dream of an Amer-Indian Church





#### D. The Socio-Political Dimension of the Franciscan Mission Charism

19. Francis of Assisi and the Option for the Poor
20. Liberation Theology from the Franciscan Point of View
21. Prophetic Criticism of Social Systems from the Franciscan Viewpoint
  - Part 1: Capitalism;
  - Part 2: Marxism
22. "As Man and Women God created them..." a Franciscan Challenge
23. Franciscan Commitment for Peace
24. Our Attitude towards Science and Technology



#### E. Summary

25. The Permanent Role of Franciscans in the Church

