



Miguel Miró OAR

Witnessing to Poverty A Blessing and A Challenge

«Happy are you poor, the Kingdom
of God is yours!» (Lk 6,20)



Cover illustration: Jaazeal Jakosalem OAR

In the foreground is Jesus, who assumes the pain of those who suffer from poverty, ecological destruction and the health crisis, and gives them hope. His big heart reflects our own Augustinian identity: called to live in charity and to spread it.

In the background are the Augustinian Recollects, who, following Jesus and united to him, transmit the Church's message of hope to the people and to all Creation.

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The Kingdom of God Belongs to You

Witnessing to Poverty: A Blessing and A Challenge

*«Happy are you poor, the Kingdom
of God is yours!» (Lk 6,20)*

Pope Francis invited us, Augustinian Recollects, “to hold fast to the dream of Saint Augustine to live as brothers ‘with one heart and one soul’ (Rule 1, 2) with a renewed spirit”. And he explained further saying that it is a dream “that reflects the ideal of the first Christians and becomes a prophetic sign of communion in our world so that we may rid ourselves of divisions, conflicts and exclusion, and that harmony may reign and dialogue be promoted”¹.

I would like us to return to that dream. I invite you to dream, once again, together with Saint Augustine. In that dream our happiness is at stake. The Lord wants us to be happy, he calls us to happiness and it is what he commands us to announce. We may ask ourselves: What do we need to do to be happy? How can I make Augustine’s dream come true? We often get lost in the labyrinth of ideas, ideologies, and stories. Let’s find times and spaces to listen in silence. Let the words that Jesus proclaimed from the mount echo in the plains of our lives and reach our hearts: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of heaven!” (Mt. 5, 3).

Indeed, in the first of the beatitudes Jesus of Nazareth offers a way to happiness. We can be poor and yet very happy! Let us project ourselves towards this new perspective: the poor entrusts his life into the hands of God, he lives in hope, he always feels grateful, he prefers to need less than to have more; he has the freedom and boldness of the prophets; he is not afraid, because he has nothing to lose. The truly poor simply loves, serves, speaks freely, is deeply supportive and shares with joy. The poor, even in suffering, experiences true joy.

¹ FRANCIS, *Address to the Participants in the General Chapter of the Augustinian Recollects* (October 20, 2016).

I was asked to prepare a document on poverty². In response to this petition I propose we consider poverty as the experience of following of Jesus of Nazareth and as a liberating experience both in our life and in our mission. Poverty, like life itself, is simple and complex, it requires making options to integrate it into one's own personal approach to life. Poverty is rooted in our hearts, in the life of each one of us, in our relationships with God, with others, and with all of Creation. Let the call to follow the poor Christ resound once more, out of the vocation and charism that we have received. My wish, and my proposal, is you embody this experience in the current context, with its risks, challenges and opportunities. I am suggesting to you a paradigm shift: go from the desire to own and consume to living with gratitude in poverty and evangelical sobriety.

In this presentation I start with the first of the beatitudes: "Happy are the poor!" In the second part, I propose you live with coherence and joy the option of poverty that we have professed. The third chapter looks at poverty briefly in the light of Saint Augustine, the history of the Order and our Constitutions. In the fourth I make suggestions on how to live in poverty, the preferential option for the poor, the rethinking the economy and the relationship between poverty and ecology. In the fifth chapter I point out some concrete guidelines for living personal and institutional poverty today. And I end with an invitation to gratitude and hope.

² Cf. AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECTSS, *Life and Mission Project 2016-2022*, G.1.



La sublime redención
Se consume en una cruz
Donde Aquel que todo es luz,
Murió como un ladrón.
Entendamos el corazón
Ante el bello monumento
Que al malo le dió escarmiento
Y al bueno le prometiera
Residir o residiera
El Autor del firmamento.

1

“Happy are the poor!”

“Happy are the poor!”, says Jesus to men and women of every age. And He says it to us today too, in this new era we happen to live. He says this to a vulnerable humanity which is anxiously seeking security, well-being and happiness. It is evident that we all want to be happy, we seek happiness³.

The beatitudes respond to the desire for happiness that God has placed in the human heart to attract it to himself, the only one who can satisfy it. Saint Augustine teaches it when he asks himself: “Why am I looking for you, Lord?” The answer that is given is categorical: “Because by looking for you, my God, I am looking for a happy life.” And from there originates his request: “Let me seek you that my soul may live; for as my body draws its life from my soul, so does my soul draw its life from you.”⁴

We need to get closer to Jesus or, better, to allow ourselves to be found by him, listen to his word and open our hearts to sense how from the love of Christ there emerges a poverty that springs from the bottom of the heart, an attitude of poverty that frees us from selfishness, brings us closer to the God of life and unites us in solidarity with the poor of this world.

1.1. The spirit of the Beatitudes

Jesus of Nazareth announces the good news of the Kingdom to the poor and sinners. Jesus himself chooses to be poor and draws close to the poor to show them God’s love, mercy and forgiveness. And he calls them “happy”. Jesus makes a demanding proposal to those who want to follow him: “You cannot serve God and money” (Lk 16:13). His prophetic word is opposed to

³ Cf. SERGIO CENTOFANTI, “Pope Francis and the Way of True Happiness” in *Vatican News* (March 19, 2019); ENRIQUE ROJAS, *Una teoría de la felicidad* (35ª ed.).

⁴ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions* 10,20,29.

the happiness of the rich and powerful, and the desire of so many people to accumulate wealth.

“A surprising path, Pope Francis acknowledges, and a strange object of blessing... is this one of poverty”⁵. And he affirms: “Jesus manifests God’s desire to lead men to happiness. This message was already present in the preaching of the prophets: God is close to the poor and the oppressed, and delivers them from those who mistreat them. But in this preaching of his, Jesus follows a particular path: he starts with the word “blessed”, that is, happy. He continues with the indication of the condition to be so; and he concludes by making a promise. The cause of blessedness, that is, of happiness, lies not in the requisite condition — for example, “poor in spirit”, “mourning”, “hungry for righteousness”, “persecuted” — but in the subsequent promise, to be welcomed with faith as a gift of God. One starts from a condition of hardship in order to open oneself to God’s gift and enter the new world, the “Kingdom” announced by Jesus. This is not an automatic mechanism, but a way of life in following the Lord, through which the reality of hardship and affliction is seen in a new perspective and experienced according to the conversion that comes about. One is not blessed if one is not converted, capable of appreciating and living God’s gifts”⁶.

Who is Jesus referring to when he declares the poor happy? According to Lk. 6, 20, those who are poor in a social sense are happy; while in Mt 5,3 it is the poor “in spirit” who are happy, that is, the humble, those who do not trust in their riches, but only in God the Father.

In Matthew, Jesus proclaims the beatitudes from atop a mountain. These, placed at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, constitute the first of his five great discourses, which acquires a programmatic character for the whole of the Gospel. In the “Sermon on the Mount,” the first of the Evangelists makes a solemn presentation of the Beatitudes, which are like the new law. Jesus is the new Moses in a new Sinai, who no longer proposes a path of strong-willed effort, but a new style of life that only God can grant and that, therefore, must be requested in prayer.

Luke, for his part, places the beatitudes in the so-called “sermon on the plain”. His sermon is shorter, and in it there is also a certain allusion to Moses who, coming down the mountain, meets the people who have come to listen to him, in need of salvation. Jesus approaches these people, forgives their sin, heals their illnesses, saves and establishes the Kingdom of God. The message of Jesus is addressed to the community of believers; its exhortative character is

⁵ FRANCIS, *General Audience* (February 5, 2020).

⁶ FRANCIS, *Angelus* (January 29, 2017).

accentuated by the use of the second person and, in general, by the relief given to the poor in this sermon on the plain⁷.

In Luke's logic, it will be necessary to correct unjust structures, share material goods and transform the economic order, so that the poor may have what belongs to them according to justice. In this Gospel we find the same demands for social justice as in the prophets. In Matthew's logic, on the other hand, a new attitude toward possessing is required. This evangelist sees the need to acknowledge that, before God, we are all poor; He wants to convey that it is good to be dependent on God and that man is valued for what he is, and not for what he has⁸.

Pope Francis deals in depth with all this when he asks what is meant by "poor" in the Gospel: "We have to ask ourselves: what does he mean here by the "poor"? If Matthew had used this word only, then the meaning would have been simply economic, that is, it would have meant people who have few or no means of sustenance and are in need of the help of others. However, unlike Luke's, the Gospel of Matthew speaks about "poor in spirit". What does this mean? According to the Bible, the spirit is the breath of life that God communicated to Adam: it is our most intimate dimension, let's say the spiritual dimension, the most intimate one, the one that makes us human beings, the deep core of our being. Thus, "the poor in spirit" are those who are and who feel poor, mendicants in their intimate being. Jesus proclaims them blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them"⁹.

The Pope acknowledges that "poverty" is a word that always creates difficulty; and, to better support his "theology of poverty", he resorts to the teaching of Saint Paul in 2 Cor 8: 1-9: "Jesus Christ, rich as He was, made Himself poor for your sake", has abased himself for us. Hence the meaning of the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit." That is to say, "to be poor is to allow oneself to be enriched by the poverty of Christ and not to want to be rich with riches other than those of Christ; it is doing what Christ did. It is not only becoming poor, but it is about taking "one more step", because - he says - "the poor make me rich"¹⁰.

The poor, in an evangelical sense, keep alive the goal of the Kingdom of Heaven and already manifest in this world the happiness that comes from God. Pope Francis affirms: "The happiness of the poor in spirit has a double dimension: in relation to goods and in relation to God. With regard to material

⁷ Cf. SANTIAGO GUIJARRO OPORTO, "Evangelio según san Mateo" en *Comentario al Nuevo Testamento, Casa de la Biblia*, 44-46; LUIS FERNANDO GARCÍA-VIANA, "Evangelio de Lucas" en *Comentario al Nuevo Testamento, Casa de la Biblia*, 206-208; S. A. PANIMOLLE: "Pobreza" en *Nuevo diccionario de Teología bíblica* (1990), 1484-1500.

⁸ Cf. JOSÉ RODRÍGUEZ CARBALLO: "Líneas bíblicas y eclesiológicas" en *Actas del Simposio "La gestión de los bienes eclesiales de los institutos de vida consagrada"* (2015), 39-40.

⁹ FRANCIS, *General Audience* (February 5, 2020).

¹⁰ FRANCIS, *Homily in Santa Marta* (June 16, 2015).

goods, this poverty of spirit is sobriety: not necessarily renunciation, but the ability to savor what is essential, to share; the ability to renew each day the amazement at the goodness of things, without overloading oneself in the monotony of voracious consumption. The more I have, the more I want; the more I have, the more I want. This is voracious consumption that kills the soul ... In relation to God it is praise and recognition that the world is a blessing and that at its origin is the creative love of the Father. But it is also openness to him, docility to his lordship, he is the Lord, he is the Great One. I am not the great one because I have many things. It is He who wanted the world to belong to men, and He wanted it that way so that men could be happy"¹¹.

And, coming down to the concrete reality of daily life, Francis affirms that, "when we give help to the poor, we do not do charitable works in a Christian way." Certainly, we are dealing with a "good" act, a "human" act; but "this is not the Christian poverty that Paul wants, the one that he preaches." "Christian poverty" means "that I give what is mine, and not only what is superfluous but even what is necessary, to the poor, because I know that he enriches me." 'And why does the poor man enrich me?', he asks himself; to which he replies: "Because Jesus said that He Himself is in the poor"¹².

Those who suffer material and human poverty are poor before God and before men. In this sense, the poverty of the indigent is an evil, and his cry reaches the heart of the Father. The answer of the Father is Jesus Christ and his Kingdom of justice and peace. The poor are those who are victims of injustice, are marginalized by society, are wanting in their illness and loneliness; they are poor, those who lack the necessary goods to live with dignity. Poor also are those who are psychologically tormented and lead bitter lives; those who are victims of their own greed and obsessions, those who are so closed in on themselves that they do not know God's mercy nor are they capable of sympathizing with others.

In short, the poor are all those who fill the great hospital of the world the way the Bishop of the Poor, Saint Thomas of Villanueva described to his faithful: "This world, like a great hospital, is full of needy and poor people... Do not think that only those called poor are poor, and those to whom you give food and clothing. Is he not poorer he who does not have faith, wisdom, judgment, discretion, reason or sense? Do you feel sorry for the wounds on the body and not for the ulcers that are carried in the soul? Open your eyes and, wherever you look, you will see a multitude of people who need your help"¹³.

¹¹ FRANCIS, *Angelus* (2 January 29, 2017).

¹² Cf. FRANCIS, *Homily at Santa Marta* (June 16, 2015).

¹³ SAINT THOMAS OF VILLANOVA, *In Dom, VI post Pentecosten*, vol I, 749.

To all of them Jesus announces the love of the Father, liberation, peace and the hope of being happy despite their misfortune.

The “poor in spirit”, on the other hand, is one who has the same spirit that moved Jesus. It is not the rich man who sets his heart on riches. Nor the poor with the rich man’s mentality. It is the poor man who, like Jesus, thinks of the poor, recognizes their value, approaches them, manifests the Father’s love for them with his love and gives his life for them. Poor in spirit is Mary, the mother of Jesus; she proclaims the mercy of the Lord, her spirit rejoices in God, her savior. She feels happy and grateful, because the Lord has looked on the lowliness and poverty of his handmaid, he has overthrown the powerful and exalted the humble (Lk 1, 46-55). Mary in the *Magnificat* synthesizes the hope and messianic spirituality of Yahweh’s poor.

1.2. Poverty in an emerging Church

In order to adequately consider poverty in the Order and how it is lived out, it is necessary to place ourselves in the Church, which is essentially evangelizing, missionary. In all simplicity, Pope Francis told us in the meeting with the Superiors General: “As a religious community, we must dare to start from the radicalness of our charism. We must dare to leave our safe zones and head for the periphery. We must ask ourselves where and how a bourgeois existence keeps us from being truly prophetic in this world. Like the Apostles at Pentecost, we should be willing to leave the safe walls of the Cenacle and go out into the world. ‘Out into the world’ refers to the peripheries, existential and social. The existential poor and the social poor are motivating the Church to go out into the world”¹⁴.

Already the Second Vatican Council proposed poverty as a path of following Christ: “Just as Christ carried out the work of redemption in poverty and persecution, the Church is also called to follow the same path to communicate to men the fruits of salvation”¹⁵. Out of fidelity to its origin and mission, the Church cannot fall into the temptation of entrenching herself in spaces of influence and political power or in ephemeral populisms. “Hence, his call to collaborate not only with everything that is positive in people of good will, but to initiate and promote, in honest and loyal collaboration, long-term processes that can develop and perfect integral human development”¹⁶.

¹⁴ FRANCIS, *The Gospel must be taken without sedatives. Meeting with the Superiors general. Summary by Antonio Spadaro* (November 25, 2016).

¹⁵ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Lumen Gentium* 8.

¹⁶ JORDI BERTOMEU FARNÓS, “Francisco y la guerra mundial a pedazos 2.0”, in *Vida Nueva* 3.186 (July 11-17, 202), 26.

Francis does nothing more than follow the teaching of the Council by presenting the way of Christ in this world as the foundation of the way of the Church. “God’s heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that He Himself “became poor” (2 Cor 8:9). The entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor. Salvation came to us from the “yes” uttered by a lowly maiden from a small town on the fringes of a great empire. The Savior was born in a manger, in the midst of animals, like children of poor families; he was presented at the Temple along with two turtledoves, the offering made by those who could not afford a lamb (cf. Lk 2:24; Lev 5:7); he was raised in a home of ordinary workers and worked with his own hands to earn his bread. When he began to preach the Kingdom, crowds of the dispossessed followed him, illustrating his words: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor” (Lk 4:18). He assured those burdened by sorrow and crushed by poverty that God has a special place for them in his heart: “Blessed are you poor, yours is the kingdom of God” (Lk 6:20); he made himself one of them: “I was hungry and you gave me food to eat”, and he taught them that mercy towards all of these is the key to heaven (cf. Mt 25:5ff.)¹⁷.

Consequently, all of us will be judged by our relationship with the poor. “And if I ignore the poor today, if I leave them to one side, pretend they are not there, the Lord will ignore me on the day of judgment. When Jesus says: “You have the poor always with you,” he means: “I will always be with you in the poor. I will be present in them. And this is not being a communist, it is the center of the Gospel: we will be judged by this”¹⁸.

This is not a matter of the present, nor a fad, nor a passing trend. The Spirit has always aroused prophetic voices in the Church that awakened consciences, and has moved the hearts of men and women who, like Good Samaritans, have drawn close to those who suffer and those who are abandoned along the way. Now, Pope Francis invites the universal Church and each particular Church to enter into “a decided process of discernment, purification and reform”¹⁹, which requires prayer, study, reflection and the capacity to listen and dialogue. And we, as an Order, can say that we also urgently need a process of missionary discernment and transformation, a process that passes through evangelical poverty and solidarity with the poor. A process that requires openness to the Spirit and availability for a personal, community and ecological conversion.

¹⁷ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* (2013) 197.

¹⁸ FRANCIS, *Homily at Santa Marta* (April 6, 202).

¹⁹ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 30.





Augustinian Recollects in Banes (Cuba)

2

We choose to follow the poor Christ

In the Church, we are all called to follow Jesus. This call and the encounter with him become a path, a path of faith and love that gives depth and meaning to our entire life. The encounter with Jesus leads us to experience the love of the Father, inspires our desire to love and serve, spreads the humanizing power of the Gospel and makes us feel happy. "The beatitudes reveal an order of happiness and grace, beauty and peace. Jesus celebrates the joy of the poor, to whom the Kingdom already belongs (Lk. 6, 20)"²⁰.

2.1. The way of beatitudes

To follow Jesus is to choose the path that he trod and to understand one's own life in the light of the paschal mystery. "The path of the beatitudes is a paschal path that leads from a life according to the world to a life according to God, from an existence guided by the flesh - that is, by selfishness - to one guided by the Spirit"²¹.

The Beatitudes are a gift of the Father's mercy, the promise of a grace of interior transformation, of a new heart. Jesus' proposal is much more demanding than the old Law: he is not content with a correct external behavior, but asks for a truth, a purity, a sincerity that compromises the depth of the human heart: «Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5, 20). Accepting the Gospel means going directly to the depth, the simplicity, the unity of all human life, perceiving its ultimate meaning and thus understanding the conditions for true happiness. When considering the beatitudes, we must contemplate the second part of each one, what grace it offers us: possessing the Kingdom, being consoled,

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2546.

²¹ FRANCIS, *General Audience* (April 29, 2020).

receiving the earth as an inheritance, being satiated, obtaining mercy, seeing God, and being called a son of God – different names for happiness. «You will be blessed when they insult you and persecute you and slander you because of me. Rejoice, for your reward will be great in heaven” (Mt 5: 11-12)²².

“In following Jesus Christ, we learn and practice the beatitudes of the Kingdom, the lifestyle of Jesus Christ himself: his love and filial obedience to the Father, his deep compassion in the face of human pain, his closeness to the poor and the little ones, his fidelity to the mission entrusted, his helpful love to the gift of his life. Today we contemplate Jesus Christ as the Gospels transmit Him to us in order to know what He did and to discern what we should do in the current circumstances”²³.

2.2. We are Prophets of the Kingdom

The Lord calls us to follow him and to be part of the Church. In it all the faithful, by virtue of their regeneration in Christ, share in a common dignity; all are called to holiness; all cooperate in the mission of the Church, each according to his own vocation and the gift received from the Spirit (cf. Rom 12:38). “The equal dignity of all members of the Church is the work of the Spirit. However, the variety of forms is also the work of the Spirit. He constitutes the Church as an organic communion in the diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries”²⁴. The Church is rejuvenated and manifests her vitality through the power of the Gospel, and the Spirit continually renews her, edifying and guiding her “with various hierarchical and charismatic gifts”²⁵.

In communion with the Church let us remember with gratitude the multitude of historical forms of consecrated life, inspired by the Spirit and still present today in the Church. These appear as a tree full of branches that has its roots in the Gospel and bears abundant fruit in every age of the Church²⁶. Among these historical forms are religious orders and congregations with their own charism and mission.

The charism is not an abstract term or a beautiful theory of the past to escape from evangelical radicalism. For Pope Francis, “the charisms in the Church are not something static or rigid, they are not «museum pieces». Rather, they are rivers of living water (cf. Jn 7,37-39) that run through the terrain of history to

²² Cf. JACQUES PHILIPPE, *La felicidad donde no se espera. Meditación sobre las Bienaventuranzas* [2ª ed.] (Madrid 2018), 5-39.

²³ V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe, *Aparecida Document* (2007), 139.

²⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* (1996) 31; Cf. Id. *Christifideles Laici* (1988), 20-25; VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Lumen gentium*, 4; 12; 13; Id. *Gaudium et spes* 32; CONG. PARA LA DOCTRINA DE LA FE, *Carta luvenescit Ecclesia* (2016).

²⁵ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Lumen gentium*, 4; Cf. Id. 13; 39, 42; CONG. PARA LA DOCTRINA DE LA FE, *Carta luvenescit Ecclesia* (2016), 1.8.

²⁶ Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Lumen gentium*, 43; JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* (1996) 5.

water it and make the seeds of good germinate. Sometimes, out of a certain sterile nostalgia, we may be tempted to do ‘charismatic archeology’. Let us not give in to this temptation! The charism is always a living reality and as such it is called to bear fruit, as the parable of the gold coins that the king gives to his servants teaches us (cf. Lk 19, 11-26), to grow in creative fidelity, as the Church constantly reminds us (VC 37)²⁷. The charism is the grace that flows from the Spirit and reaches our hearts every day to configure our way of loving, living and serving. To accept one’s charism with fidelity is to open oneself to the creative action of the Spirit who always renews and sanctifies our life and our mission.

Religious are called to be a prophetic sign of the holiness of the Church. By living their own charism, they aim to make present “the kind of life that the Son of God took on when He came into this world to fulfill the will of the Father, and which He himself proposed to the disciples who followed Him”²⁸. By their consecration through the profession of the evangelical counsels, the religious want to assume the same sentiments that Christ had, who “gave up all He had and took the nature of a servant ..., made obedient unto death” (Phil 2, 7 -8), and for us “He became poor, being rich” (2 Cor 8: 9). With humility and moved by the Spirit, they “follow more closely the annihilation of the Savior and bear a more evident testimony of Him by embracing poverty in the freedom of the children of God”²⁹.

The magisterium and theological reflection after the Council have dwelt on with greater depth the following of Jesus and the call to live love fully³⁰, fraternal life in community³¹, the eschatological meaning of the evangelical counsels³², the charisms and the evangelizing mission³³. And they have also reflected on the prophetic dimension of consecrated life. Because, yes, the religious freely promises to live evangelical poverty according to his own charism, but always

²⁷ FRANCIS, *Message to the participants in the Second International Symposium “In Fidelity to the Charism. Rethinking the Economy”* (November 25, 2016); cf. CONG. PARA LA DOCTRINA DE LA FE, *Carta luvencit Ecclesia* (2016).

²⁸ CONC. ECUUM. VATICANO II, *Lumen gentium*, 44; cf. *Ibid.* 13, 39, 42, 45, 46.

²⁹ CONC. ECUUM. VATICANO II, *Lumen gentium*, 42.

³⁰ Cf. PAUL VI, *Evangelica testificatio* (1971); JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptionis Donum* (1984); Exhortación apostólica *Vita consecrata* (1996); FRANCIS, *Carta a los consagrados* (2014); CIVCSVA: *Elementos esenciales de la doctrina de la Iglesia sobre la vida religiosa dirigidos a los Institutos dedicados a obras apostólicas* (1983); *Mutuae relaciones* (1978); *Potissimum institutioni. Orientaciones sobre la formación en los institutos religiosos* (1990); *Vida fraterna en comunidad «Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor»* (1994); *Caminar desde Cristo* (2002); *El servicio de la autoridad y de la obediencia* (2008); *Vultum Dei quaerere. Sobre la vida contemplativa femenina* (2016); *Instrucción Cor orans* (2018); *El arte de la búsqueda de Dios* (2019); *El don de la fidelidad. La alegría de la perseverancia* (2020).

³¹ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community. «Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor»* (1994).

³² Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptionis Donum* (1984); *General Audience del 8 de febrero*, 1995. CIVCSVA, *Contemplad, Carta a los consagrados* (2015).

³³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Letter to the Consecrated People* (2014); *Id. È tempo di camminare. La vita consacrata nel magistero pontificio* (2018); CIVCSVA, *Vida y misión de los religiosos en la Iglesia* (1980); *Id. Alegraos* (2014); *Id. Contemplad* (2015); *Id. Escrutad* (2016); *Id. Anunciad* (2016); *Id. A vino nuevo, odres nuevos* (2017); *Id. El don de la fidelidad. La alegría de la perseverancia* (2020); CONGREGACIÓN PARA LA DOCTRINA DE LA FE, *Carta luvencit Ecclesia* (2016).

seeking a “voluntary poverty embedded in the following of Christ, of which it is, today, a highly esteemed sign”³⁴.

“The evangelical counsel of poverty, in imitation of Christ, who, being rich, became destitute for us, in addition to a life poor in deed and in spirit, vigorously restrained and detached from earthly riches, carries with it dependence and limitation in the use and disposition of the goods, in accordance with the norm of the proper law of each institute”³⁵. The character of the charism does not dilute the radical nature of poverty; rather, it embodies it and makes it concrete in a common way of living it, and integrates it into the way of being and into the way of acting of each religious.

Saint John Paul II dealt with this especially in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata*, where he affirms that, “even before being a service on behalf of the poor, *evangelical poverty is a value in itself*, since it recalls the first of the Beatitudes in the imitation of the poor Christ. Its primary meaning, in fact, is to attest that God is the true richness of the human heart. Precisely for this reason evangelical poverty forcefully challenges the idolatry of money, making a prophetic appeal, as it were, to society, which in so many parts of the developed world risks losing the sense of proportion and the very meaning of things”³⁶.

This is, finally, one of the favorite themes of Pope Francis: “I am counting on you ‘to awaken the world’, since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy. As I told the Superiors General: ‘Radical evangelical living is not only for religious: it is demanded of everyone. But religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way.’ This is the priority that is needed right now: ‘to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth... a religious must never abandon prophecy’”³⁷.

The poverty of Jesus lives on in those who, being poor, unite themselves more intimately to the body of Christ who, as Lord, is the head of the poor³⁸. With their consecrated poverty the religious bear witness to a truly human quality of life that makes temporal goods relative, since only God can fill the heart. The simplicity, sobriety and austerity of life of consecrated persons, give them total freedom in God³⁹.

No one, nor anything, can occupy the centrality that alone is owed to the person’s adherence to Christ. And based on this consideration, it makes sense

³⁴ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Perfectae caritatis* 13.

³⁵ CODE OF CANON LAW, c. 600.

³⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata*, 90. The theme on prophetism is in III, II: A Prophetic Witness in the Face of Great Challenges, 84-95.

³⁷ FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter to the Consecrated People*, II, 2.

³⁸ Cf. *Constitutions* 45.

³⁹ FRANCIS, *Address to the Pontifical Representatives* (June 21, 2013); cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the Service of the Charism and Mission* (2018) 8.

to renounce family, one's own life and all things: "Sell your possessions and give to those in need. Make for yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you in heaven, where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it;" (Lk. 12, 33).

The Bible speaks of false prophets, and they still exist today. And now, and always, the only guarantee of authenticity is listening to the Word, so that the prophet himself becomes an incarnate word coming from God. "Yet if he does not take time to hear God's word with an open heart, if he does not allow it to touch his life, to challenge him, to make demands on him, to exhort him, to mobilize him, and if he does not devote time to pray with that Word, then he will indeed be a false prophet, a fraud, a shallow impostor"⁴⁰.

Religious bear witness to the spirit of the Beatitudes and through union with Christ, by means of the vow of poverty, they make present the goods of the Kingdom and make themselves available for the evangelization of the world, especially of the poor⁴¹.

"The greatest service that religious render to humanity, unbridled by the desire to have and to enjoy life, is the testimony of their lives, evoking the first of the beatitudes of Jesus. It is therefore not surprising that the consecrated life requires evangelical radicalism. Poverty is a touchstone in renewal. In fact, there is still a lingering suspicion about its credibility as a lifestyle. Religious consecration and option for the poor go hand in hand, since it is incomprehensible to follow Jesus and not irradiate his love for the poor. The people of God expect from the religious a more coherent life and greater solidarity with the dispossessed"⁴².

Institutes of consecrated life are called to be a prophetic voice and living witness of configuration to the poor Christ and of his presence among the poor. "This loving poverty is solidarity, sharing and charity, and it is expressed in moderation, in the search for justice and in the joy of what is essential, to alert people to the material idols that obscure the true meaning of life. A theoretical poverty is not enough, but rather the poverty that is learned by touching the flesh of the poor Christ, in the humble, the poor, the sick and children"⁴³.

For every Christian, the liturgy is a daily experience of meeting the risen Lord. The liturgy makes the whole Church participate in the salvation of men and of the entire Creation. This is evident above all in the Eucharist, wherein the religious with a prophetic sense asks the Father to unite his poverty to the

⁴⁰ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 151.

⁴¹ Cf. *Constitutions* 277; CONC. ECUM. VATICANO II, *Lumen gentium* 31.

⁴² AQUILINO BOCOS, *Un relato del Espíritu. La vida consagrada postconciliar* [2^{ed}] (Madrid 2018), 333; cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 151.

⁴³ FRANCIS, *Message to Participants in the International Symposium on the Management of Ecclesiastical Good* (March 8-9, 2014); cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, *Cómplices del Espíritu. El nuevo paradigma de la Misión* (Madrid 2014) 195-236.

offering of Christ⁴⁴. The Eucharist requires “a commitment in favor of the poor: to truly receive the body and blood of Christ given for us, we must recognize Christ in the poorest, His brothers”⁴⁵. The religious with the power of the Eucharist makes the prayer of the Church his own and asks the Lord to give him the depths of mercy in the face of all human misery, to inspire him with the appropriate gesture and word in front of his lonely and helpless brother, and to help him to be available to those who feel exploited and depressed⁴⁶.

Today, as always, the prophet is the man who is passionate about Christ and humanity, a person who is free and undertakes going against the current, willing to give his life, spends time in prayer, and who charges his heart with grace and love. He is the one who knows how to discern what comes from God and what is the fruit of human selfishness, knows the reality of this world and speaks of God without fear of what others will say. The prophet feels poor, hears the cry of the poor and denounces injustice. He does not remain in vagueness and abstractions, but knows how to be concrete and realistic in life. His style is not diplomacy, or partisanship, because he sees things with an eye of faith. The prophet, in short, is the one who has wisdom to discern and not remain in egocentric spiritualism or mere social activism.

2.3. The economy at the service of the charism

The changing times in which we find ourselves demand a human, social, cultural and religious renewal. The historical moment in which we are living forces the Church and consecrated life to face the persistent world economic crisis with realism and hope.

From this perspective, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA), following the magisterium of Pope Francis and with his approval, published in 2018 the document “Economy at the service of the charism and mission. *Boni dispensatores multiformis gratiae Dei. Orientations*”. This document is a call to religious institutions, that, in fidelity to their own charism, they rethink the economy according to the ecclesial sense of their goods and their management⁴⁷.

The guidelines and principles expressed in this document are offered as an aid “for the Institutes to respond with renewed audacity and prophecy to the challenges of our time and to continue to be a prophetic sign of God’s

⁴⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Una gran esperanza. La custodia de la Creación* (Città del Vaticano 2019) 33-35.

⁴⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1397.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Misal Romano* (7^a edic. 1992), *Plegaria eucarística V/b*; JUAN PABLO MARTÍNEZ PELÁEZ, “La Eucaristía, el alimento partido y compartido por la Iglesia en la mesa de los pobres” en AGUSTINOS RECOLETOS, *Programa de formación permanente 2020: Profetas del Reino*, 11.

⁴⁷ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 3-4.

love⁴⁸. I consider this document to be of special importance in order for the Order to think through the experience of poverty, to rethink the economy and to administer the assets with responsibility and transparency. I will limit myself to highlighting some significant aspects following its four sections: “Live memory of the poor Christ” (5-21); “The gaze of God: charism and mission” (22-33); “Economic dimension and mission” (34-49); “Operational indications” (50-97).

2.3.1. “Live memory of the poor Christ”

“Living the newness of the Gospel means living in a way that reflects in our lives the poverty of Christ, whose existence was centered on doing the will of the Father and serving others⁴⁹. Thus, we see that Christ asks his followers to welcome and live the primacy of the Kingdom, which should be preferred and put before all else. That is why he calls the poor in spirit “blessed” (Mt 5,3), because they are in a position to desire him and welcome him. They live the happy poverty that liberates them interiorly and allows them to grow in faith and charity. Happy poverty is what Jesus advises the young man who left sad, because he had many possessions and wanted to keep them for himself (Mk 10:22)⁵⁰.

By opting for poverty, professed in a vow, according to the specific charism, consecrated persons become living and credible witnesses of moderation lived with freedom. “With their poverty, consecrated persons bear witness to a truly human quality of life that relativizes goods, revealing God as an absolute value⁵¹.

The consecrated are called not only to personal poverty, but also to communitarian poverty; it is not only the religious, but also the institutions. Consequently, the religious community as such, has to show solidarity with the poor and creatively discern how to collaborate in a social transformation that will allow them to live with dignity.

It must be borne in mind that, according to Canon Law, a religious institute may possess goods (c. 634,1), but they are ecclesiastical goods (c.634.1). The religious institutes, being public juridical persons in the Church, are to use these goods in a manner corresponding to the mission of the Church. In this way, the institute shares, by right, its same purpose and commitment, contributing to the same evangelical goals for promoting the human person, for evangelization, for charitable sharing, and for solidarity with the People of God, in particular in the

⁴⁸ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 3. Cf. Ib. *Líneas orientativas para la gestión de los bienes en los Institutos de vida consagrada y en las Sociedades de vida apostólica* (2014) 6.

⁴⁹ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 5.

⁵⁰ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 5-8.

⁵¹ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 8.

care of poores⁵². The fundamental criterion for the evaluation of works is fidelity to the charism and mission. So profitability cannot be the only criterion to take into account. Consequently, discernment is necessary to rethink the economy and the management of the assets of religious institutes.

The fact that the economic management is entrusted to a limited number of religious does not exempt the other members to see to it that the assets of the Institute are at the service of their specific charism. The treasurers and the councils of economy must be formed in economic management according to the charism. For this, they must have the advice of professionals in order to manage the assets with transparency and commit to promoting justice, peace and the integrity of Creation⁵³.

2.3.2. "The gaze of God: charism and mission"

The document we are talking about indicates how the relationship between charism and vision of the future is constitutive of the mission of the institutes. Vision of the future that is not just any gaze, but a gaze focused from God, from the search for his will, that is, a spiritual experience of discernment. "To look beyond the present requires having a design, that is, a spiritual and ecclesial experience that gradually takes shape and is translated into concrete terms, into action"⁵⁴.

In the current ecclesial context, a real change in mentality is required: the commitment to think together with diocesan organizations and other religious congregations to seek possible solutions which guarantee the significance of the works. We can no longer speak of "our" works or the "works of the religious", without being integrated into the life of the local Church. The future of works concerns us as a Church and we must face it as such⁵⁵.

The document speaks of a "solidarity network" to integrate individual actions and "working together" so that with the collaboration of all, the quality and reliability of services can be promoted. And he understands by "reliability" a heritage of values in which credibility (cohesion and coherence with a project and management vision), professionalism (attentive and open to learning, but not solely for efficiency) and experience (cognizant of its past performance, but open at the same time, especially to innovation and creativity)⁵⁶.

⁵² Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 634,1; 635,1; 1257,1; 114,1; 116,1; VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes* 76; CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 15.

⁵³ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 12-21.

⁵⁴ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 23.

⁵⁵ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 32.

⁵⁶ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 32-33.

2.3.3. “Economic dimension and mission”

Pope Francis had already spoken of the necessary discernment when deciding which works should continue: “Being faithful to the charism often requires an act of courage: it is not about selling everything or giving up all the works, but about seriously discerning [...], Discernment may suggest maintaining an ongoing work that incurs losses, but making sure that these losses are not caused by incapacity or incompetence”⁵⁷. And the CIVCSVA document also influences this, according to which, “to assess the sustainability of the works, it is necessary to adopt a method that considers every aspect and all possible interrelations, taking into account the charismatic, relational and economic dimensions, both of each work and of the whole institute”⁵⁸.

“You have to remember that there is no contradiction between charism and asset management. Managing according to economic criteria does not stifle charism, but rather allows us to seek and achieve shared goals. Ensuring the continuity and vitality of the charism means not acting superficially and incompetently”⁵⁹. If there is not good management, the works are unsustainable and the mission comes to nothing.

Therefore, it is necessary to re-read the mission based on the charism, making plans that are achievable, so that we do not stay with outdated works and abandon others that need to be promoted in order to evangelize. “Wherever charismatic fidelity is recognized, the economy is to be put at the service of prophecy in a concrete and effective project”⁶⁰.

The works will be managed in, a spirit of openness, community and co-responsibility, even when their care must be entrusted to a few consecrated persons and other people are included. “On the other hand, in some cases the responsibility is entrusted to some individuals, without establishing clear structures for interaction and accountability”⁶¹.

For the orderly and forward-looking management of assets, it is requested - with the obligation indicated in canon law - that the stable patrimony of each Institute be established. The stable patrimony made up of property, movable and immovable, guarantees the subsistence of the Institute, the Provinces and the legitimately erected houses and their members, and assures the fulfillment of its mission.

⁵⁷ FRANCIS, *Message to the participants of the Second International Symposium on the theme: “Rethinking the use and management of our goods in light of our charism”* (Rome, November 25, 2016).

⁵⁸ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 34.

⁵⁹ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 37.

⁶⁰ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 35.

⁶¹ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 36.

And the document calls for a clear definition of the criteria for the management of this stable patrimony. Thus, as a particularly remarkable innovation, it recommends that the budget of the institute, of each of the levels (general, provincial or local) should provide a detailed report regarding both the patrimonial and the economic components. Similarly, it is recommended that, in an accompanying report regarding the assets there should be an analysis of any changes that have taken place, the current status, and the use of the asset⁶².

And finally, for the better management of assets, three interconnected principles are indicated: responsibility, transparency and the maintenance of trust. No responsibility is given without transparency, transparency generates trust, trust verifies both and supposes the two previous ones.

From responsibility derives, at least, the requirement of oversight and control. "Oversight and control should not be understood as a limitation to the autonomy of the entity or as distrust; rather, they are a service to communion and transparency, and also serve to protect those who carry out delicate administrative tasks"⁶³. Responsibility and transparency are a requirement in all types of financial reports and balances.

2.3.4. "Operational Instructions"

In the administration of goods and in the management of the works of religious institutes, the CIVCSVA proposes three horizons, while establishing six criteria for discernment.

The great horizons into which economic activities are inserted are: an economy that counts on the human being, the totality of the person and, in particular, the poor; the reading of the economy as an instrument of the missionary action of the Church; and, lastly, an evangelical economy of exchange and communion.

These horizons are specified in several fundamental criteria⁶⁴:

1. *Fidelity to God and to the Gospel*. Every consecrated life gives primacy to God, in the *sequela Christi*. Every consecrated person must first of all focus on Him, contemplate Him, learn from Him, imitate Him, follow Him, the chaste, poor and obedient, so as to be faithful proclaimers of the Good News. "This is why, the gift of listening, to listen to God, that with Him we may hear the cry of the people, to listen to the people until breathing in the will to which God calls us, is so indispensable".

⁶² CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 72.

⁶³ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 41.

⁶⁴ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 51.

2. *Fidelity to the charism.* Every charism “is always a living reality” called to “be developed in creative fidelity”. Fidelity to the charism is, therefore, the harmony between the real choices in a given situation and the core identity of the Institute”.
3. *Poverty.* A “responsible austerity”, a “healthy humility and a happy sobriety” favor distancing from the perception of assets being owned, in favor of expressing the use of one’s assets in the context of developing a special willingness to hear ‘the cry of the poor, of the everlasting poor and of the new poor’.
4. *Respect for the ecclesiastical nature of goods.* The assets of the Institutes of consecrated life are ecclesiastical goods (can. 634 § 1) destined to the attainment of the purposes of the Church (can. 1254). The Institutes, in the use of goods, are called to safeguard their nature and to observe the respective canonical discipline.
5. *The sustainability of the apostolates.* The works of the Institutes are by nature situated in social and economic systems.
6. *The need for reporting.* Reporting is a way of acting that openly shares choices, actions, and results.

In addition to these criteria, discernment must take into account the healthy traditions of each Institute and in the unique requirements of each legal and social context. “In no case can the requirements of the civil laws that apply to individual institutes of consecrated life or to its Provinces or parts of the Institute or their equivalent be disregarded”⁶⁵.

With a more markedly legal and practical character, this fourth part of the document contains some eminently practical indications: some, peculiar to Canon Law and others suggested to be included in the institute’s own legislation⁶⁶. It is worth highlighting the following: permission for the alienation of assets, the areas of responsibility belonging to the general and provincial chapters, the responsibility of the superiors and their councils with regards the economy, the administrative regulations, the treasurer and the economic council, the collaboration of outside professionals, forms of internal audit, administration and management of assets, authorization from the Holy See for the sale or donation of real estate.

Finally, the responsibility of superiors is underlined in terms of facilitating the formation of both the religious and the laity in the areas of economic management, the Social Doctrine of the Church, the various economic-administrative problems possible...

⁶⁵ CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 54.

⁶⁶ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 54-97.

The CIVCSVA, finally, concludes with a call for “all” consecrated persons to be good administrators of the manifold grace of God (1Pt 4,10): prudent and faithful administrators (Lk. 12, 42), with the task of caring diligently for what has been entrusted to them.





Solidarity aid in Palmira (Venezuela)

3

Poverty in Saint Augustine and the Recollects

3.1. In Saint Augustine

Saint Augustine's reflection⁶⁷ on poverty starts, precisely, with the Beatitudes, particularly that which refers to the poor in spirit. The Saint points out that the poor in spirit are happy because they recognize that their only treasure is God⁶⁸.

Poverty, for him, is a spiritual condition, through which the human being is invited to live detached from material goods, placing his trust only in God and learning to use (*uti*), instead of enjoying (*frui*)⁶⁹ things, without clinging to any of them, but to God alone.

Poor is he who recognizes that his greatest treasure is God, and tries to remove all the idols that can occupy his heart: money, power, vanity ... Poverty is understood by Saint Augustine as a process of interior liberation; a process by which man detaches himself from creatures and from himself, in order to rise to God. The heart of man cannot remain in the things of the earth, but must ascend towards God, since, if he remains in the things of the earth, the heart decays⁷⁰.

For this reason, beyond man's external conditions –having many or few goods–, poverty is primarily an internal matter, an attitude of the heart. It is thus understood that there may be poor in material goods who are rich in pride and

⁶⁷ Cf. ENRIQUE EGUIARTE BENDÍMEZ, "Saint Augustine y los pobres de su tiempo", in *Augustinus* 59 (2014) 47-76; JAVIER RUIZ PASCUAL (ed.), *Saint Augustine. Obras y textos monásticos*, vol. I (Madrid 2009); *Ibid.* Vol II (Madrid 2010); Serge Lancel, *Saint Augustine* (London 2001).

⁶⁸ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Commentary on Ps* 141,5.

⁶⁹ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *The Christian Doctrine* 1,4,4.

⁷⁰ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Commentary on Ps* 85,6.

avarice⁷¹; and, on the contrary, there are rich in material goods who are poor in spirit, that is, humble and charitable⁷².

Poverty must lead human beings to recognize their essential anthropological condition as “beggars of God”⁷³. By himself, the human being has nothing, beyond his sins; He has received everything from God⁷⁴.

Ultimately, the poor imitate the example of Christ, who annihilated himself and took on the condition of servant: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: imitate the One who, though rich, became poor for you”⁷⁵.

And that awareness that nothing belongs to him, leads the poor to gratitude⁷⁶, as well as to feel simply a mere administrator of everything he has received from God⁷⁷. Hence, the profound social meaning that poverty has for Saint Augustine: every human being is invited to share with others what he is and has.

On the other hand, rich and poor need each other⁷⁸. The latter offer an opportunity for the rich to share and recognize in them the presence of Christ. This is a mystery that Augustine likes to contemplate in the text of Mt 25:35; a passage that, as he confesses, made an impression on him⁷⁹: “Have Christ above giving; acknowledge him here in need. Here he is poor; there he is rich. Since Christ is poor here, he speaks for us: ‘I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was naked, I was a stranger, I was in prison’”⁸⁰.

Poverty, on the other hand, shows itself through work⁸¹, be it manual or spiritual, pastoral or intellectual. No one, within the community, should exempt himself from working, be it a concrete work, or prayer and the offering of his own life to the Lord. For Saint Augustine, it will always be a work carried out from the community and in the community’s name, avoiding individualism and putting the things in common before their own, as he points out in the Rule: “In the same way, no one seeks anything for himself, but may all your work be carried out for the common good, with greater dedication and more assiduous readiness than if each one did it for himself. Because charity, of which it is written “that it does not seek its own” (1Cor 13, 5), is understood thus: that one puts common things before one’s own, not one’s own over the things in common”⁸². Saint Augustine invites the religious to share the fruit of their work with the poor and not to accumulate goods, following the model that he

⁷¹ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 114B,11.

⁷² Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 14,4.

⁷³ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 56,9.

⁷⁴ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 32, 10.

⁷⁵ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *On Holy Virginity* 28.

⁷⁶ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 283,3.

⁷⁷ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 359A,11.

⁷⁸ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Commentary on Ps* 37,24.

⁷⁹ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 389,5.

⁸⁰ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 123,4.

⁸¹ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Of the Works of the Monks* 3.

⁸² SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Rule* 5,2.

saw in a monastery in Rome, where the monks “did not care in any way about accumulating an abundance of goods: they had no other struggle than to get rid of what was not necessary, to the point of sending ships loaded with food to places where poor and needy people live”⁸³.

For Saint Augustine, the example of the primitive community of Jerusalem is decisive. The text of the Acts of the Apostles 4, 32-34 is his main reference. For him, the community of goods is a sign and a necessary condition for the union of hearts. It makes it possible and manifests it and, consequently, makes the community a temple of the Lord. Without it, the union of hearts remains a simple illusion, because private property focuses man in on himself and on material goods, which, being limited, cannot be shared by all and lead to individualism and discord⁸⁴.

Finally, for the Saint the commitment to the poor was not just a utopia or a theoretical topic. His life is full of prophetic gestures of love towards those in need. Suffice it to recall the “*matricula pauperum*”, the list of the poor of Hippo who were periodically helped⁸⁵; or the shelter for the poor, the sick and pilgrims, the so-called *Xenodochium*, which he had built⁸⁶; or the food that every year he offered to the poor of Hippo on the anniversary of his episcopal consecration⁸⁷. To tell the truth, he had a real passion for them, which even led him to adopt as his title of glory that of “*beggar of beggars*”⁸⁸.

3.2. Among the Augustinian Recollects⁸⁹

The mendicant Orders had emerged in the Church in the 13th century as a prophetic protest against the social differences that were increasing because of the incipient money economy. A lot of mendicant movements arose aspiring to a life of personal and common poverty, of the individual and of the convent. The mendicant friar would embrace poverty because he wanted to share the humiliations and sufferings of Christ; because he wanted to experience the destitution of the apostles during their mission.

With the passage of time, and already in the sixteenth century, within the Order of Saint Augustine, a desire for greater perfection, greater austerity, more intense community life, greater recollection and more authentic prayer life, arose. The wishes of the religious who wanted to embrace this tenor of life were heeded and were included in the Fifth Act of the Chapter that the Augustinian province of Castile celebrated in Toledo (Spain) in 1588.

⁸³ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sobre las costumbres de la Iglesia católica* 1,67.

⁸⁴ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Commentary on Ps* 131,5-6.

⁸⁵ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Letter* 20*,2.

⁸⁶ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 356,10.

⁸⁷ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 339,4.

⁸⁸ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 66,5.

⁸⁹ Cf. ÁNGEL MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *Historia de los Agustinos Recoletos: Vol I Desde los orígenes hasta el siglo XIX* (Madrid 1995); *Id. Historia de los Agustinos Recoletos: Vol II El siglo XIX* (Madrid 2015); *Id. La Orden de Agustinos Recoletos. Evolución carismática* [2º ed.] (Madrid 2020).

From their birth, the Augustinian Recollects banished any practice that violated individual poverty or broke common life. Nobody could own anything, no matter how minimal, and the treatment, the clothing, the food, the bed, everything was identical for everyone. Only the sick deserved special attentions.

They did it with complete freedom, without ever considering it a burden. This was reflected in the *Forma de Vivir* (Way of Living), the document that regulated their way of life during the first years. There it reads: «True poverty in a religious does not consist only in not possessing things, but, and principally, in not having a desire or an attachment for anything; this is the end toward which external poverty is ordered. But, because ordinarily you love what you have, and what you don't have or see is despised, so in order to be observe poverty of the affections it is desirable that we be poor in our possession and in their use»⁹⁰.

And the first Recollects were not content with simple individual poverty. They expected that the convent would also be poor. They only accepted ownership of the building and the surrounding garden, but they rejected rents and inheritances. During the first two or three decades, the real life of the communities faithfully followed the austere path ushered in by the *Forma de vivir*. Their income was almost always very modest and this helped them to observe a humble way of life.

Already in the middle of the seventeenth century, the love of poverty began to wane. They begin to see it as a burden that had been imposed on them by an option of life belonging to the past which now they no longer shared. Consequently, poverty is going to be a source of discontent and, as a consequence, decline sets in.

The legal texts will continue to urge it rigorously. The Constitutions do not fail to see in private property "the root of almost all evils"⁹¹ and, consequently, they will definitely prohibit any act of ownership or personal usufruct of money, rentals or any other kind of movable and immovable property. But the practical life moves further and further away from the spirit of the *Forma de vivir*.

The general practice of other Orders and the ease in granting administration permits and usufruct of some properties, opened the door to the practice of keeping personal possessions. They had access to money, income, houses, fields and even chaplaincies that often required residence outside the convent. Only on the death of the religious are his belongings turned over to the Provincial who in turn would give it to the religious community to which the deceased belonged or to a more needy community.

The Philippine Revolution (1896-1898) sowed discouragement and panic among the religious. It uncovered some weaknesses and corruptive practices, which, despite the evidence, had gone almost unnoticed. Fortunately, the Order

⁹⁰ *Forma de Vivir* 4, 1.

⁹¹ *Constitutions* de 1637, 94r; *Constitutions* de 1664, 153.

had religious, who, far from being daunted and being carried away by defeatism, with an abundance of self-denial and imagination sought for a graceful solution. They realized that a greater fidelity to the original charism and the laws they had professed was necessary. Particular emphasis was placed on the restoration of common life and individual poverty.

All these ideas began to gain ground in the middle of the 20th century with the entry of the Order into the field of education (1941). In March 1951, the prior general Eugenio Ayape (1950-1962) dedicated an extensive circular on poverty in which he set out its nature as virtue and vow, and the central position assigned to it by both the Rule of Saint Augustine and the various Recollect constitutions.

The Second Vatican Council was a wind of renewal for the whole Church that, among other things, called for the rediscovery of the authentic evangelical poverty, as a following of Christ, and a coherent and credible witnessing to the Kingdom of Heaven⁹².

In contrast to this, during the first years after the Council, there were frequent cases of religious who, without taking into account the value of poverty, administered considerable amounts of money with great autonomy. Despite this, the economic centralization of the provinces was consolidated and the community spirit was strengthened, avoiding many abuses. At the same time, the religious, with a greater knowledge of the History of the Order and following the orientations of the Magisterium of the Church, were reflecting in greater depth on the theology of poverty, which requires operational channels that help to live it with a renewed evangelical spirit.

3.3. Poverty in the Constitutions

Our Constitutions were revisited according to the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and the charism of the Order, in the 1974 General Chapter. The current text, enriched with references from Sacred Scripture, Saint Augustine, the *Forma de vivir* and the Magisterium of the Church, was revised and adapted by the General Chapter of 2010 and approved by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CIVCSVA) in 2011. Subsequently, the same Congregation approved some modifications proposed by the General Chapter of 2016.

When explaining “consecrated poverty”, the Constitutions start from consecration to God and the freer and more radical following of Christ by the profession of the evangelical counsels. The mystery of the poverty of Christ,

⁹² Cf. RAMÓN SALA, “En el mundo por los pobres. El legado de la constitución *Gaudium et spes*”, en *Concilio Vaticano II. 40 años después*, CISA (Madrid 2006), 153-190; ENRIQUE GÓMEZ GARCÍA, *Pascua de Jesús, pueblos crucificados* (Salamanca 2012) 94-97.

“the Son of God made man, who announced the good news of the Kingdom to the poor, in poverty and persecution, continues in the lives of those who, being truly poor, unite themselves more intimately to the body of Christ who, as Lord, is the head of the poor”⁹³.

In the following numbers of the Constitutions the features of Augustinian poverty are elaborated: communion of goods (46-47), with clear reference to the primitive community of Jerusalem (cf. Acts 4,32), humility (48), personal and community sobriety (51), work (53), common life (54).

The Constitutions gather the teaching of the Magisterium and post-conciliar theological reflection, taking on a new terminology. Thus, in the 2010 chapter, taking into account the Latin American ecclesial reality, the preferential option for the poor is incorporated into the constitutional text: “The signs of the times demand from the Order a conscience committed to the real problems of society in each historical moment, which urges us to assume the preferential option for the poor, for the family and for life, arbitrating, from a shared discernment, the appropriate responses in evangelization and pastoral care”⁹⁴.

According to the Constitutions, poverty affects not only the religious in particular; the communities also must give collective witness to evangelical poverty. In the Additional Code, the social meaning of goods is emphasized: “Poverty does not merely suppose an inner detachment and a common austerity, but also a sharing and a solidarity with the poor and with those who suffer, with whom the Lord identifies, and whose evangelization appears as a sign of the Messianic mission”⁹⁵. And they make, finally, a call to the religious to commit themselves “to those initiatives that promote social justice, human solidarity, peace and the integrity of Creation”⁹⁶.

The Order as such can acquire, possess, manage and dispose of temporary assets. This capacity is not expressly excluded or limited by the Constitutions⁹⁷; However, they indicate that any kind of luxury, immoderate profit and accumulation of goods must be avoided⁹⁸. And the purposes for which this possession is lawful are also indicated: “divine worship, maintenance of houses of formation, fitting support of the community, works of the apostolate and to help those most in need”⁹⁹.

They also establish that the general, provincial and local treasurers be appointed, who are to carry out their office according to the guidelines and

⁹³ *Constitutions* 45.

⁹⁴ *Constitutions* 282.

⁹⁵ *Additional Code* 57.

⁹⁶ *Constitutions* 317.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, c. 634.

⁹⁸ *Constitutions* 51; cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Perfectae caritatis* 13.

⁹⁹ *Constitutions* 473.

under the supervision of the respective superior. The appointment of the economic council and the possibility of having recourse to lay experts are also mentioned¹⁰⁰.

Lastly, the Constitutions are the common reference for following Christ and for life in the Spirit. They mark our lifestyle, the organization of the Order and the way we carry out the apostolate. Consequently, they are also a reference for our personal poverty, the communion of goods, solidarity with the poor and the organization of the economy in the Order.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Constitutions* 474-476.

Trip from Palawan to Casian by pumpboat (Philippines)



4

Our poverty: blessing and hope

In our reflection on poverty, we started from Christ who, being of divine condition, stripped himself of his rank and became a man so that we could be children of God. He calls the poor happy, because they welcome the Kingdom of God. The call to live in poverty of spirit, care for Creation and solidarity with the poor is addressed to all who believe in Jesus.

The Augustinian Recollects, by profession of the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, want to make Christ present and be prophets of the Kingdom by opting for the same lifestyle that the Son of God followed in this world. Before God and before others, we have chosen to be poor according to the charism and mission of the Order. The time has come to re-visit poverty, to follow the poor Christ and rekindle the prophetic voice, listening to the cry of the poor of today.

4.1. Liberating poverty

The Order, as a living cell of the Church¹⁰¹, and in communion with her, is called to “fulfill its mission by following in the footsteps of Jesus and adopting His attitudes (cf. Mt 9: 35-36). He, being the Lord, became a servant and obedient until death on the cross (cf. Phil 2, 8); being rich, he chose to be poor for us (cf. 2 Cor 8, 9), teaching us the path of our vocation as disciples and missionaries. In the Gospel we learn the sublime lesson of being poor by following Jesus who is poor (cf. Lk 6, 20; 9, 58), and that of proclaiming the Gospel of peace without bag or saddlebag, without putting our trust in money or in the power of this world (cf. Lk 10, 4). In the generosity of the missionaries the generosity of God is

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Constitutions* 6; 10; 28; 286.

manifested; in the gratuitousness of the apostles appears the gratuitousness of the Gospel"¹⁰².

That is also what we profess, driven by a great desire to love and follow Jesus, the poor Jesus. And we cannot remain in a merely theoretical and doctrinal approach to poverty; as religious we want to live it, and live it with joy, as Jesus proposed in the Beatitudes.

Poverty is lived in the heart and is embodied in persons who exercise it. Our great patrimony as an Order is not the money that we may have; our wealth is the religious, their unconditional dedication to Christ and their humble and simple service to others. Let us open our eyes and see with a spirit of faith the elderly and the sick who have given their lives with fidelity and joy, working hard, saving as much as possible and always being generous with others. Let us admire the young people who today leave behind their jobs, their human dreams and their securities, in order to be Augustinian Recollects. Let us remember the dedication of the brothers who are day by day with the poor in missions or in ministries of human and spiritual poverty. Let us value the religious who with self-denial and sacrifice work full of enthusiasm to continue serving parishes, educational centers and houses of formation.

In our personal journey, obviously, _ ideal and _ reality come into conflict. Tension arises between what I do and what I want to do. It is a tension that should not lead us to discouragement, but should become a time of grace, of listening, of encounter and of communion. We want to be consistent and we need sincerity and prophecy to live the realism that only the Gospel can give us. From the perspective of our encounter with Jesus, personal tension and the crisis of realism become an opportunity for our love to be more authentic. A moment of crisis is a moment of choice. It is a moment that places us before the decisions we have to make.

Our consecration, and therefore our poverty, is something which we can live either in an egocentric way – even with religious appearances – or with an oblation love that frees us and makes us grow humanly and spiritually. It is a matter of keeping oneself united to Christ and open to the Spirit who renews, transforms and sanctifies. When we give in to “worldliness” and we cast our minds back, embarking on a path of disillusionment and abandonment of prayer, then poverty becomes a burden and the reasons for living it vanish. Indeed, “whoever excludes God from his horizon falsifies the concept of reality and, consequently, can only end up on the wrong paths and with destructive recipes”¹⁰³.

¹⁰² V GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN EPISCOPATE, *Aparecida Document* 31.

¹⁰³ BENEDICT XVI, *Opening Message in Aparecida* (Aparecida, 13 de mayo de 2007) 3.

Poverty is at the very base of fraternal communion. “The poverty of each one, which implies a simple and austere lifestyle, not only frees from the concerns inherent to personal property, but has always enriched the community, which has thus been able to dedicate itself more effectively to service of God and of the poor”¹⁰⁴. Hence, in the Order, those who seek to ascend and be important cannot feel good, nor those who use the community to feed their ego. The brother who seeks “power” or feels superior to others is not accepted.

“With Jesus Christ, on the contrary, joy is constantly born and”¹⁰⁵. Because only He can fill our hearts, and this is how Augustine experienced it: “I only know one thing: that it is wrong for me to be far from you, Lord, and not only outside of me, but even within myself. And that all wealth that is not my God is poverty”¹⁰⁶. If we choose a bourgeois lifestyle whose criterion is comfort, our life becomes insipid and ends up boring and exhausting. That’s when we crave for tokens of affection outside the community in search of a little happiness.

However, as consecrated persons we are called to become a prophecy, starting from our life animated by charity, by the logic of gift, of gratuitousness; we are called to create fraternity, communion, and solidarity with the poor and the needy. If we want to be truly human, we need to make room for the principle of gratuitousness as an expression of fraternity¹⁰⁷.

In our communities we need more fraternal life, more dialogue, more hope and joy. To achieve this we must feel poorer, in need of God and of our brothers and sisters. We need the concern and joy of the young and the experience of the elderly to break through our securities and stereotypes that prevent us from living with confidence and contributing to the community everything we have, and from our community to serve the people of God with enthusiasm.

4.2. Our attitudes, desires and poverties

What does the invitation to poverty say to us today, to a life poor in the evangelical sense? Pope Francis is unequivocal: “First of all, he tells us what God’s style is. God does not reveal himself through the power and wealth of the world, but through weakness and poverty: “... ‘though He was rich, yet for your sake he became poor...’. Christ, the eternal Son of God, one with the Father in power and glory, chose to be poor; he came amongst us and drew near to each of us; he set aside his glory and emptied himself so that he could be like us in all things (cf. Phil 2:7; Heb 4:15). God’s becoming man is a great mystery! But the reason for all this is his love, a love which is grace, generosity, a desire to

¹⁰⁴ CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community* (1994) 44.

¹⁰⁵ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* (2013) 1.

¹⁰⁶ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions* 13, 8,9.

¹⁰⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (2009) 34.

be near, a love which does not hesitate to offer itself in sacrifice for the beloved. Charity, love, is sharing all with the one we love. Love makes us alike, it creates equality, it breaks down walls and eliminates distances. God did all this with us"¹⁰⁸.

We religious have chosen to imitate Christ. We have committed ourselves to following him and be by his side, and to walk a path of poverty that leads to the joy of the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Mt 5, 3; Lk 6, 20). As his disciples, we are to follow in his footsteps. "And what are the steps of Christ? - Pope Francis asks -: Poverty. God became man! He abased himself! He was stripped! He embraced poverty that leads to meekness, to humility. This humble Jesus who takes to the street in order to heal. And so an apostle with this attitude of poverty, of humility, of meekness, is capable of having the authority to say: "Be converted", so as to open hearts"¹⁰⁹.

It is difficult for us to enter into the logic of God. Matthew narrates the multiplication of the loaves and the fish (cf. Mt 14,13-21). Jesus had compassion on the crowd. At dusk, the practical disciples tell Jesus to send the people away so they can fend for themselves and find something to eat. Jesus took pity of the crowd and said to the disciples, "You give them something to eat". Pope Francis says that Jesus "wants to educate his friends of yesterday and today in the logic of God. And what is the logic of God that we see here? The logic of taking charge of the other. The logic of not washing your hands of him or her, the logic of not looking the other way ... The term "let them fend for themselves" does not enter into the Christian vocabulary"¹¹⁰.

When we share with love and joy, Jesus has compassion and the miracle happens. "Offer freely the loaves that you have, but not just the loaves, enrich them with two special fish that are charity and joy. God does not look at 'how much', but at 'how'; for He says: "God loves the one who gives with joy." Not with sadness or brusqueness because one ought to "show his happy face when giving" (Eccl. 35). Oh, how alms are transformed into joy! God does not want gifts given under duress. If you gave with joy, without a doubt you would collect seven baskets for your future glory"¹¹¹.

When we become so busy with so many things that we do not have even a little time to share, it may be timely to recall those words of Saint Basil: "You should be grateful and happy for the honor that has been granted to you, since it is not you who has to disturb at the door of others, but others who come to your door. But instead you withdraw and make yourself almost inaccessible,

¹⁰⁸ FRANCIS, *Lenten Message* (December 26, 2013).

¹⁰⁹ FRANCIS, *Homily at Santa Marta* (February 7, 2019).

¹¹⁰ FRANCIS, *Angelus* (August 2, 2020).

¹¹¹ SAINT THOMAS OF VILLANOVA, *In Dom. VI post Pentecosten*, vol. 1, c 752.

you shy away from meeting others, so as not to be obliged to give a small gift. You only know how to say: “I have nothing to give, I am poor.” In truth you are poor and deprived of all that is good: poor in love, poor in humanity, poor in the trust in God, poor in eternal hope¹¹².

4.2.1. Path of grace and humility

Humility is the attitude and virtue that opens the heart to God, while pride leaves no room for grace: “Have feelings of humility with each other, because God resists the proud, but gives his grace to the humble” (IPt 5.5). Humility is the basis of prayer and of man’s relationship with God. Prayer comes from the earth, from humus, a word from which “humble”, “humility” is derived. It comes from our precarious state, from our constant thirst for God. Humility has a Christological foundation and opens the heart to the theological virtues¹¹³.

Well-lived religious poverty leads us to choose the path of salvation that Jesus chose, a path of humility, grace and self-giving. God gives himself to the humble because humility is opposed to pride, which is self-sufficiency of those who do not need God and feel superior to others. The true poor are humble, and that is why consecrated poverty is closely related to humility, it is opposed to pride and selfishness, which is the desire to own to the exclusion of others¹¹⁴.

The humble man can see his own reality without fear, without perfectionism or pessimism, and because he is able to tell himself the truth and to recognize the dignity and relational character of every human person, he can be in solidarity with others. If we are humble, we feel poor, we accept our imperfection and at the same time we feel called to overcome our deficiencies with simplicity and confidence. Saint Augustine, in the *Confessions*, when narrating how he lives, goes through the senses to confess his happiness and his need: “Far be it, Lord, far be it from me to think that enjoyment of any and every kind could make me happy; For there is a joy which is not granted to the wicked, (Isaiah 48:22) but to those who worship You thankfully, whose joy You Yourself art. And this is the happy life and this alone — to rejoice in you, about you and because of you; this is the life of happiness, and it is not to be found anywhere else¹¹⁵. Augustine feels needy and poor before God¹¹⁶; then, he humbly places his hope in the Lord’s mercy: “For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content, I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound... I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phil 4, 11.13). Comfort me so

¹¹² SAINT BASIL THE GREAT, *Homily 6 on Charity* 6.

¹¹³ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2259; 2560-2561.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Constitutions* 48.

¹¹⁵ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions* 10,22,32.

¹¹⁶ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions* 10,38,63.

I may be capable of doing all things. Give what you command and command what you will"¹¹⁷.

Humility allows us to see "the limits of what is ours, and thus opens the way to the greatest Truth. Only humility can find Truth and Truth in turn is the foundation of Love, on which ultimately everything depends"¹¹⁸. Self-reliance encloses us in ourselves, while communion, dialogue and service teach us to see things with more humility and help us to be more realistic and more human.

Humility is the abode of charity¹¹⁹. If there is no humility and charity, poverty is useless, because pride corrupts the heart of the religious. Let us remember the words of Saint Augustine in the Rule: "Any other vice consists in performing bad works; on the other hand, pride stalks even good works, so that they are lost. And what benefit is derived from abandoning the estate, giving it to the poor (cf. Ps 111, 9; Lk 18, 22; 1Cor 13, 3), and from becoming poor, if the unhappy soul becomes more proud by despising wealth than when he owned it"¹²⁰.

When one speaks of humility, one often thinks of humiliation and the psalms of praise and thanksgiving are not taken as a reference: "I thank you, Lord, because you have wonderfully made me, because your works are admirable. You know me to the bottom of my soul" (Ps. 138,14). Humility is a virtue that goes beyond humiliation, because it serenely accepts its own limits and recognizes its own qualities as gifts, without being proud of them. In suffering and misunderstandings, the humble is faithful and continues to trust God. He suffers in humiliation, but transcends it. Happiness is found in humility¹²¹.

The cross, by itself, without love and without the light of resurrection, is foolishness and scandal; Seen with the eyes of the heart, it is the power and salvation of God. There are no human reasons to explain the cross; It is not a technical problem to be solved, but a mystery that must be lived: a mystery that is accepted or rejected, but not discussed, but rather contemplated and lived. Cross and love are an indivisible unity, one requires the other. Love becomes credible only in sorrow, and sorrow has value only in love. The cross acquires its value from the fact that Christ has allowed himself to be nailed to it and in it has given his life out of love. Therefore, it is possible to be happy in annihilation, carrying the cross every day as Jesus did (cf. Mt 16:24)¹²².

It can be said that humility is intellectual honesty and that it is the fruit of love. He who is humble recognizes his dependence on God, knows his limits and is grateful for the gifts he has received. For Saint Augustine, the poor in its

¹¹⁷ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Confessions* 10,31,45; cf. 10,29,40; 10,37,60.

¹¹⁸ BENEDICT XVI, *Message on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the International Theological Commission* (October 22, 2019); cf. *Deus caritas est*, 35.

¹¹⁹ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *On Holy Virginity* 51,52.

¹²⁰ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Rule*, 1,7; cf. *Sermon* 85,2.

¹²¹ Cf. GABRIELE FERLISI, *Solo, davanti a te. Meditazioni agostiniane* (Milano 2006), 269-273; 281-287; *Id. El carisma de los agustinos descalzos* (Teramo 2020); *Id. "Formarsi alla kenosi dell'umile Gesù per essere felici di servire l'Altissimo in spirito di umiltà", in Presenza agostiniana (2020/ 2) 20-24.*

¹²² Cf. GABRIELE FERLISI, "Formarsi alla kenosi dell'umile Gesù per essere felici di servire l'Altissimo in spirito di umiltà", *in Presenza agostiniana (2020/ 2) 16-25.*

deepest meaning is the humble. Humility disposes to act with freedom of heart, to be in solidarity with those in need and to be a credible eschatological sign¹²³.

It is not enough just not to have or to share the assets; you have to see what we really want. Let's not fool ourselves, lest we live repressed and make life miserable by wanting what we don't have, believing that by having little we are already poor. If, even being poor, we crave earthly vanities, says Saint Augustine, "monasteries will be of use to the rich and not to the poor, if it turns out that the rich practice humility in them and the poor, right there, become arrogant"¹²⁴.

Without humility and a spirit of poverty, we cannot receive the gift of the Spirit, which is grace. If we do not have humility, we will have to ask for it. The words of Saint Augustine to Dioscurus are known: "Do not prepare for yourself any other way of seizing and holding the truth than that which has been prepared by Him who, as God, saw the weakness of our goings. In that way the first part is humility; the second, humility ; the third, humility: and this I would continue to repeat as often as you might ask direction, not that there are no other instructions which may be given, but, because, unless humility precede, accompany, and follow every good action we perform, being at once the object which we keep before our eyes, the support to which we cling, and the monitor by which we are restrained, pride wrests wholly from our hand any good work on which we are congratulating ourselves"¹²⁵.

The path of grace and humility allows us to return to the heart and meet Christ, ourselves and others. This is how the Constitutions express it: "Only with the help of Christ, by means of purification through humility, can man re-gain his identity and enter once again into himself, where he begins to search for eternal values, finds Christ once again, and recognizes his brothers. This is the transcending Augustinian interiorization, the starting point of all piety. This is the interior life, or recollection, of the Way of Life, a path that leads directly to contemplation, community and the apostolate"¹²⁶.

4.2.2. Discernment and communion

We must continue to ask ourselves, what is the Lord asking of us today, the Augustinian Recollects? What does the Church expect of us and what do the people of God need? How can we know? How do we discern the signs of the times? How do we live evangelical poverty today? How can we know if our inspirations comes from God or if they are deceptions of our making?¹²⁷.

In the exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, Pope Francis asks: "How can we know if something comes from the Holy Spirit or if it stems from the spirit of

¹²³ Cf. GABRIELE FERLISI, *Solo, davanti a te. Meditazioni agostiniane*, 269-273; 281-287.

¹²⁴ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Rule* 1,6.

¹²⁵ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Letter* 118, 22.

¹²⁶ *Constitutions* 11.

¹²⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* (1996) 84-86.

the world or the spirit of the devil? The only way is through discernment, which calls for something more than intelligence or common sense. It is a gift we must implore. If we ask with confidence that the Holy Spirit grant us this gift, and then seek to develop it through prayer, reflection, reading and good counsel, then surely we will grow in this spiritual endowment¹²⁸.

The Pope speaks to us of two voices: on the one hand, there is the voice of God, “who kindly speaks to conscience”; and on the other, there is the tempting voice “that induces evil.” “God’s voice never forces us: God proposes himself, he does not impose himself. On the other hand, the evil voice seduces, attacks, compels, arouses dazzling illusions, encouraging emotions, but fleeting ones. At first it softens, it makes us believe that we are all-powerful, but then it leaves us empty inside and accuses us: “You are worthless”. The voice of God, on the other hand, corrects us, with so much patience, but always encourages us, comforts us: always nourishes hope”. “The evil voice always revolves around the self, its impulses, its needs, everything and immediately” – said Francis – while the voice of God “invites us to go beyond our self to find the true good, peace¹²⁹.

Another difference that the Pope points out is how precisely do we face life. “The voice of the enemy distracts us from the present and wants us to focus on the fears of the future or the sadness of the past ... it brings to the surface bitterness, the memories of the wrongs suffered, of those who have hurt us”. Instead, the voice of God “speaks to the present”...now you can do good, now you can exercise the creativity of love, now you can renounce the regrets and remorse that hold your heart captive¹³⁰.

And it also reminds us of the supernatural meaning of discernment, although it is true that “spiritual discernment does not exclude existential, psychological, sociological or moral insights. But it transcends them. Nor are the Church’s sound norms sufficient. We should always remember that discernment is a grace. Even though it includes reason and prudence, it goes beyond them, for it seeks a glimpse of that unique and mysterious plan that God has for each of us, which takes shape amid so many varied situations and limitations¹³¹.

The formation of one’s own conscience, learning to discern, is particularly necessary today, because “contemporary life offers immense possibilities for action and distraction, and the world presents all of them as valid and good. All of us, but especially the young, are immersed in a culture of zapping. We can navigate simultaneously on two or more screens and interact at the same time

¹²⁸ FRANCIS, *Gaudete et exsultate* On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World (2018), 166.

¹²⁹ FRANCIS, *Regina coeli* (May 3, 20200).

¹³⁰ FRANCIS, *Regina coeli* (May 3, 2020).

¹³¹ FRANCIS, *Gaudete et exsultate* On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World (2018), 170.

with two or three virtual scenarios. Without the wisdom of discernment we can easily become prey to every passing trend¹³².

Discernment is not only necessary in extraordinary moments, or when you have to solve serious problems, or make a crucial decision. We always need it, so as to be ready to recognize the times of God and his grace, not to waste the Lord's inspirations, not to miss his invitation to grow. It is an instrument of struggle to better follow the Lord, and many times it acts in the small things, in what seems irrelevant, because magnanimity is shown in the ordinary and in daily life¹³³.

Francis has pointed out three dangers in the life of the Church: clericalism, worldliness, and gossip¹³⁴. These dangers can be said to directly threaten the experience of poverty. It is hard to understand that a religious who wants to be poor should seek power and clerical domination, maintain a double life and use defamation to be above others. Clericalism is the tendency to confer on priests and religious a power of dominance and superiority by enjoying a spiritual, moral and, on some occasions, even economic power. It can be "encouraged by the priests themselves or by the laity"¹³⁵ and, in the words of Francis, it can be summed up by saying that "the clerics feel superior, they distance themselves from the people"¹³⁶.

We cannot ignore that, among the main causes of child abuse, which is causing so much pain and damage in the Church, is clericalism, which leads to the abuse of power and the betrayal of trust¹³⁷.

Both personal and community discernment help us feel poor before God; they allow us to be aware of our own limits and possibilities, while, through charity, they open our hearts to communion and solidarity with the poorest. On the other hand, listening to and discerning the Lord's will makes us feel co-responsible in the life and mission of the Church, of a synodal and evangelizing Church.

Because communion fosters unity and is enriched by diversity. Respect for the dignity of people is sacred, and this implies listening to different opinions, certainly avoiding any imposition or defamatory remark. Its opposite is the self-referential positions, which generate division and conflict to impose their own ideas. "Do not spend too much time and resources in 'looking inwards

¹³² FRANCIS, *Gaudete et exsultate*, 167.

¹³³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Gaudete et exsultate*, 169.

¹³⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Message to the Archdiocese of Buenos Aires* (October 27, 2018).

¹³⁵ FRANCIS, *Letter to the People of God* (August 20, 2018).

¹³⁶ FRANCIS, *Homily at Santa Marta*: March 13, 2020; December 13, 2016.

¹³⁷ Cf. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, XV General Assembly: Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment (October 27, 2018), 29-30. Cf. DANIEL PORTILLO TREVIZO, *Psico-Teología del Discernimiento vocacional. Una tentativa de protección del abuso sexual de menores en la Iglesia Católica*.

at yourselves’ and drawing up plans focused on the internal mechanisms themselves, on the functionality and capabilities of the system itself. Look outwards, don’t gaze at yourselves in the mirror¹³⁸.

4.2.3. Simplicity, sobriety and austerity of life

According to Saint Posidius, Saint Augustine personally lived with simplicity and frugality. “His clothing, footwear and household goods were modest and convenient: neither too elegant nor too vile¹³⁹. And, in the Rule, Saint Augustine will make clear the contrast between worldly desires and the happiness of God’s servants, thus offering us an excellent key of discernment to live poverty: “Let them believe themselves richer who are better able to bear frugality; for it is better to need little than to have much¹⁴⁰.

For its part, the Forma de Vivir highlights the need to be poor not only in the ownership of goods, but also in their use and in freeing oneself from attachment to them, in order to be able to live charity with greater perfection: “True poverty in a religious does not consist only in not possessing things, but, principally, in not having a desire or an attachment for anything; this is the end toward which exterior poverty is ordered¹⁴¹.

In the Constitutions, too, personal and common sobriety is exhorted: “In accordance with the spirit of Saint Augustine and of the founders, the community should stand out by a sincere moderation in all things: it is better to have few needs than to have an abundance of riches. Not only the individual religious themselves, but the communities too, are to give collective witness to evangelical poverty before the people of God¹⁴².

Evangelical poverty must be translated into simplicity, moderation and frugality. Greed and consumption are dealt with through the art of frugality. Frugality is the denial of exaggerated consumption and the rejection of the superfluous. The goal of frugality is not to be poor, nor is it to save. And it is not to be confused with greed either. We opt for frugality when we are not willing to satisfy the desires that the marketplace presents us with or when we are opposed to entering the world of the superfluous. You are frugal when you have the inner capacity to resist the temptations of consumption. The poverty of the Kingdom of God and frugality tries to create a harmony with the cosmos from which the happiness of the whole comes to us. Evangelical poverty is “passionate poverty.” It is poverty in the perspective of a coming new world. It is

¹³⁸ FRANCIS, *Mensaje a la Obras misionales pontificias* (21 de mayo de 2020).

¹³⁹ SAN POSIDIO, *Vida de Saint Augustine* 22,1.

¹⁴⁰ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Rule* 3,5.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Forma de vivir* 4,1.

¹⁴² *Constitutions* 51.

a restless poverty, but not a violent, destructive or resentful poverty. It is simply poverty of spirit¹⁴³.

Moderation is not a value or a virtue from another time. It must be understood within the framework of an integral conversion and of a human process that frees us from ties and unites us in Christ. "Christian spirituality - recalls Pope Francis - proposes growth with moderation and a capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to simplicity that allows us to stop to value the small, to be grateful for the possibilities that life offers without being attached to what we have or being saddened by what we do not have¹⁴⁴.

The ascetic means have been and still are a help for an authentic path of poverty, moderation and holiness. Asceticism, helping to master and correct the tendencies of human nature wounded by sin, is indispensable for the consecrated person to remain faithful to his specific vocation and to follow Jesus on the way of the Cross¹⁴⁵.

Today we have a positive vision of the world, of life, of goods, of the dignity of every person, of one's own body, of intelligence and of affectivity. The entire Creation manifests the beauty and goodness of the Creator. We may say that the spiritual life, understood as life in Christ or life according to the Spirit, presents itself as a path of increasing faithfulness, on which the consecrated person is guided by the Spirit and configured by him to Christ, in full communion of love and service in the Church¹⁴⁶. We are aware of our fragility and our sin, but if we put the means within our reach and trust in the Lord, he blesses us. "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2Co 12,10).

"He created you without you will not save you without you"¹⁴⁷, Saint Augustine tells us. We need to empty our heart so that the Lord can fill it with his gifts. The attitude of Christian asceticism is "the ability to know how to renounce something for a greater good, for the good of others"¹⁴⁸. We have to come up with the means to be free and to face the tensions and setbacks of life. With humble realism we see that to live evangelical poverty one must have spiritual sensitivity and make decisions. In addition to the grace and wisdom of the Spirit, it requires on our part: effort, a spirit of sacrifice and fighting against the temptation to set our hearts on wealth and power. The asceticism of the small actions of each day, the simple details, the solidarity with the poor and the service carried out with joy widen the heart, express love and please God: "I

¹⁴³ Cf. JOSÉ CRISTO REY GARCÍA PAREDES, "El encanto amenazado. Gracia y pecados capitales en singular batalla", in *Vida Religiosa. Monográfico* 5/2019/ vol.126, 76-87.

¹⁴⁴ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 222.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* 38.

¹⁴⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* 93; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2015.

¹⁴⁷ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermon* 169, 13.

¹⁴⁸ FRANCIS, *Address to the Participants of the Second Forum Communities Laudato si'* in Amatrice (July 6, 2019).

want mercy and not sacrifice, knowledge of God more than holocausts" (cf. Hos 6,6; Mt 9,13).

A necessary asceticism for a poor person is self-control, take care of one's health, and acceptance of one's own limits, respect for others, the ability to listen, tolerance and all those human virtues that favor "the communion of spirits and hearts of those who have been called to live together in a community"¹⁴⁹.

It is hard to understand, therefore, that a religious who has opted for poverty, as well as to living with austerity, does not strive to be polite, be careful with his personal hygiene, dress with dignity, be available to serve and look after what is common to all. Also in this regard we should help each other with fraternal correction, carried out with respect and always motivated by charity¹⁵⁰.

It is easy to get carried away by the obsession to achieve perfection by yourself and to give in to the temptation to adopt the attitude of rigidity of heart. Rigidity prevents progress in the knowledge of Jesus: "Faithfulness is always a gift to God; rigidity is a protective measure for myself"¹⁵¹. It comes from the fear of change and ends up sowing limits and obstacles in the terrain of the common good, turning it into a minefield of incommunicability and hatred. "Let us always remember - says Pope Francis - that behind all rigidity there is an imbalance. Rigidity and imbalance feed off each other, in a vicious circle. And, at this moment, this temptation of rigidity is very current"¹⁵².

On the other hand, fasting, voluntary deprivation and almsgiving are proposed by the Church, in the light of the Word, as a means to intensify the life of the spirit¹⁵³. We have to discern and be consistent in order to free ourselves from the new dependencies that arise from the misuse of the means that facilitate our life and apostolic work, but which can also lead us to wasting time: internet and social networks, television and the credit card, among others. We need asceticism and to act responsibly to free ourselves of what is detrimental to the spiritual life and service to the poor; we need to avoid dependence on fashions and compulsive consumption online.

Finally, the brothers who exercise governance should help all to live poverty with an evangelical sense, without suffocating the action of the Spirit, fostering responsibility and ensuring that they have what is necessary to live with simplicity and joy.

¹⁴⁹ CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community* 27.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Rule*, 4, 7-9; *Commentary on Ps. 50,1*; *Constitutions* 17.

¹⁵¹ FRANCIS, *Homily at Santa Marta* (5 de mayo de 2020).

¹⁵² FRANCIS, *Speech before the Roman Curia* (December 21, 2019).

¹⁵³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Lenten Message* (2018).

4.3. Communion of goods, work, solidarity

The community, according to the purpose of Saint Augustine, seeks to imitate the primitive Church of Jerusalem, in which the brothers wished to have one heart and one soul directed towards God and for God¹⁵⁴. This union is expressed in the communion of goods: “they owned everything in common, and it was distributed to each one according to his_ need (Acts 4: 32-35)”¹⁵⁵.

For the Saint, the word “poverty”, as such, does not reflect the situation of his community, which has what it takes to live. “Material goods continue to be, in fact, a source of disunity, according to the motto:” This is mine and this is yours. “Augustine presents it as a cause of individualism, selfishness, envy, greed, conflicts and disputes”¹⁵⁶. What Augustine highlights is the “community of goods” as a way of building new relationships of equality and unity within the community.

For us, “consecrated poverty, which makes all things common in God, is the origin of peace, fraternity and communion [...] Necessary for common life, it is a sign and fulfillment of the ordered love that constitutes community. It is love that does not seek what is its own but what is of Jesus Christ, and that makes the religious declare solidarity with all people and, especially, with the poor, whom he must love in the heart of Christ”¹⁵⁷.

Following the teaching and the example of Augustine¹⁵⁸, the brothers feel committed to work, not only by natural law but more by virtue of their profession of poverty¹⁵⁹. Earning by their own effort what is necessary for life and for the works of the apostolate, “they show men that they do not seek an easy life in idleness, but rather the Kingdom of God along the narrow and demanding path of this commitment”¹⁶⁰.

In our life, work and prayer complement each other, both being necessary. The Lord sends us to the vineyard to work with joy. “It is very important to cultivate this joy in the religious community: overwork can extinguish it; exaggerated zeal for some causes can make us forget it; the continuous questioning of one’s identity and one’s future can overshadow it”¹⁶¹. The Lord does not want us to be neurotic activists in a constant state of anxiety working without rest, nor does he want us to be mediocre or lazy, limiting ourselves to the minimum. Already in the days of Saint Augustine there were monks who worked little and talked a

¹⁵⁴ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Rule 1, 2; Commentary on Ps. 132, 2*.

¹⁵⁵ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Rule 1, 2-3*.

¹⁵⁶ TARSICIO J. VAN BAVEL, *Carisma: Comunidad. La comunidad como lugar para el Señor* (Madrid 2004) 108.

¹⁵⁷ *Constitutions 46*.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Of the Works of the Monks 29, 37*.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Of the Works of the Monks 22, 26*.

¹⁶⁰ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Of the Works of the Monks 28, 36*. Cf. *Constitutions 53*.

¹⁶¹ CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community 28*.

lot: "If only those who declared a sit-down strike would also declared a language strike! They would not have so many imitating them if the example of idleness that they give with their lives were not, at the same time, celebrated by word of mouth"¹⁶². Life a la carte, prompted by laziness and one's own convenience, is neither Augustinian nor recollect. Whereas the work done out of love dignifies the person and associates him with the creative work of God. In free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor, human being express and enhance the dignity of their lives¹⁶³.

Work should be the environment where many dimensions of life come into play: creativity, projection of the future, development of capacities, the exercise of values, communication with others, an attitude of worship. The Church greatly depends on the witness of communities filled "with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52). Communities, that by their simplicity of life, work and show solidarity with the poorest, manifest communion and evangelical poverty. Today it is urgent to see communities in which "solitude is overcome by concern for one another, in which communication inspires in everyone a sense of shared responsibility, and in which wounds are healed through forgiveness, and each person's commitment to communion is strengthened; The nature of the charism in communities of this kind directs their energies, sustains their fidelity and directs the apostolic work of all towards the one mission"¹⁶⁴.

The communion of goods and work are for us the way of living personal and community poverty: they facilitate the union of hearts and the giving of themselves in the service of others; and they prevent us from being a religious organization dedicated - like one more company - to accumulating property. The community moved by the Spirit listens to the cry of the poor and feels in solidarity with them.

"The word 'solidarity' is a bit worn out and sometimes misunderstood, but it is much more than just a few sporadic acts of generosity. It means creating a new mentality that thinks in terms of community, of priority in the life of all over the appropriation of goods by some"¹⁶⁵. Both for us and for all Christians, it implies "recognizing the social function of property and the universal destiny of goods as realities prior to private property. The private ownership of goods is justified by the need to protect and increase them, so that they can better serve the common good. For this reason solidarity must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them. These convictions and habits of solidarity, when they are put into practice, open the way to other structural transformations and make them possible. Changing structures without

¹⁶² SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Of the Works of the Monks* 22, 26.

¹⁶³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 192.

¹⁶⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* 45.

¹⁶⁵ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 188.

generating new convictions and attitudes will only ensure that those same structures will become, sooner or later, corrupt, oppressive and ineffectual¹⁶⁶.

It is relatively easy to give alms and ignore the person in need; this is not the attitude of the Good Samaritan that Jesus proposes to us in the Gospel (cf. Lk 10: 25-37). Saint Thomas of Villanova said many times that “almsgiving is not only giving, but lifting out of need the sufferer and ridding him of it as much as possible; and that the Christian, who, being able to lift his neighbor out of need, leaves him in it, or at least does not direct him to a solution, and just leaves matters there, does not deserve the name of alms-giver”¹⁶⁷.

Solidarity, in addition to helping and assisting those in need, requires placing ourselves within the social reality of the countries in which we find ourselves and, in the light of the Gospel, promoting a more just society that respects and promotes the dignity of every human person, and avoiding the elimination of those initiatives that do not yield economic benefits. In short, let us reread and let ourselves be questioned by the principles of the Church’s social doctrine, which seeks to humanize today’s political and economic proposals.

4.4. Preferential option for the poor

In Jesus of Nazareth we will find inspiration and grace to assume the great challenge of approaching the poor with simplicity, loving them, helping them and making a preferential option for them. Let us once again let the words of the Lord in the Gospel resonate within us: “What you did to one of these poorest brothers, you did to me” (Mt 25:31).

Despite the political and biased interpretations that surfaced in the search for a more prophetic and supportive evangelization, the concluding document of the III General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate held in Puebla, Mexico (1979), used for the first time the expression “preferential option for the poor”: “We affirm the need for the conversion of the whole Church to a preferential option for the poor, with a view to their integral liberation”¹⁶⁸.

In our case, influenced by fake news with partisan reasoning, we may begin to think that the option for the poor is a vain expression and has nothing to do with our religious poverty. In unequivocal terms, Saint John Paul II questions us about our authenticity as people consecrated to God and in our evangelizing mission: “The option for the poor is inherent in the very structure of love lived in Christ. All of Christ’s disciples are therefore held to this option; but those

¹⁶⁶ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 189.

¹⁶⁷ MIGUEL SALÓN, *Vida de santo Tomás Vida de Villanueva, Arzobispo de Valencia, ejemplar y norma de obispos y prelados*, (El Escorial 1925), 277.

¹⁶⁸ CELAM, *Documento final de Puebla* (1979) 1134.

who wish to follow the Lord more closely, imitating his attitudes, cannot but feel involved in a very special way. The sincerity of their response to Christ's love will lead them to live a life of poverty and to embrace the cause of the poor¹⁶⁹. For the Order and for each one of us, this entails the adoption – both as individuals and as a community - of a simple and austere way of life that allows us to denounce, in a way consistent with our choice of a life of poverty and maintaining our independence vis-à-vis political ideologies, the injustices committed against so many sons and daughters of God. This lifestyle allows us to commit ourselves to the promotion of justice and peace in the society where we work¹⁷⁰.

After all, “free from political ideologies” does not mean disengaging from politics. The option for the poor requires defining oneself in the face of unjust political and social structures and the throwaway culture. “For the Church, the option for the poor is a theological category rather than a cultural, sociological, political or philosophical one. God grants them “his first mercy.” This divine preference has consequences for the faith life of all Christians, since we are called to have “the same sentiments as Jesus Christ” (Phil 2,5). Inspired by this, the Church has made an option for the poor which is understood as a “special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness”... That is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor¹⁷¹.

And we, as disciples and missionaries, have to learn to recognize that “the suffering faces of the poor are the suffering faces of Christ. They challenge the core of the Church’s work, pastoral care and our Christian attitudes. Everything that has to do with Christ has to do with the poor and everything related to the poor affects Jesus Christ: “In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me (Mt. 25, 40)”¹⁷².

The Order cannot turn a deaf ear to this cry. Not listening to him would place us outside the Father’s project, because we are the instruments for the liberation of our people¹⁷³. In all stages of the history of the Order there have been communities that have been characterized by responding with their prayer, creativity, effort and generosity to the human and social needs of the poor and the indigent. The general government, each province, each community and each one of us, have to feel challenged and committed, whatever the situation, age, ministry or position we have. It is a personal evangelical option, and of

¹⁶⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* (1996) 82; Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *Discurso inaugural de la V Conferencia general del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe* (Aparecida, 13 de mayo de 2007) 3.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* (1996) 82.

¹⁷¹ FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 198.

¹⁷² CELAM, *Documento final de Aparecida* (2007) 393.

¹⁷³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 187.

Transfer by boat to get to Colegio Saint Augustine de Kankintú (Panama)



the entire Order, to change ourselves and to try to change our community structures, those of society and of the culture that impede it.

We can say of the Order what Pope Francis says of the Church, that we must continue to recognize the situations of pain that our peoples suffer, permanently going out to meet them, without being afraid of getting bruised, hurt and dirty because we have been out on the streets; rather than accepting being an Order which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security¹⁷⁴.

And we cannot excuse ourselves thinking that this is for others. The Pope is clear and unequivocal: "The predilection for the poor is not something optional in the Church"¹⁷⁵. Neither is it for the Order. We need to be consistent with our vow of poverty and rethink the poverty of the Order. It is not enough for the brothers to work hard and contribute what they receive from their work to the community, if the institution has an entrepreneurial mentality in which everything is valued for economic benefits. "A community of the 'poor' is capable of being in solidarity with the poor and of showing what is at the heart of evangelization, because it specifically offers the transforming power of the Beatitudes"¹⁷⁶.

4.5. Rethinking our economy

It is difficult for us to acknowledge that we are to some degree unaware of the tragedies that oppress the world at this time. In addition to being acquainted with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which affects a large number of the countries of the world, it would be very helpful to know data such as that 900,000 people die of hunger each month, or data on the migrants, refugees, victims of wars, unemployment, etc¹⁷⁷. Unfortunately, this is news of little importance in the media.

Today everything is becoming a game of competitiveness, the law of the strongest, where the powerful swallow the weak. As a consequence of this situation, great masses of the population are excluded and marginalized: no work, no horizons, no way out. The human being himself is considered to be a consumer good, which can be used up and then tossed away. We see how a throwaway culture is being promoted. The excluded are no longer just "exploited", but considered as rejects, as "surplus."

The global crisis, which affects finances and the economy, reveals the serious deficiency of its anthropological orientation, which reduces human beings to

¹⁷⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 49.

¹⁷⁵ FRANCIS, *Message to the Pontifical Mission societies* (21 de mayo de 2020).

¹⁷⁶ CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community* 44.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. FRANCIS, *Homily at Santa Marta* (May 14, 2020); NOTICIAS ONU, *More than 100 million people can die of hunger* (April 2, 2019).

just one of their needs: consumption. Behind this attitude hides the rejection of ethics and God. Ethics is usually viewed with a certain mocking contempt. When ethics is not ideologized, it allows for the creation of a balance and a more humane social order, in which money is to serve and not rule. For this reason, it is considered counterproductive, too human, because it relativizes money and power. It is felt as a threat, as it condemns manipulation and degradation of the person. Ultimately, ethics leads to a God who expects a committed response that is outside the categories of the marketplace¹⁷⁸.

The integral promotion of each person, of each human community and of all persons, is the ultimate horizon of the common good, which the Church hopes to achieve as a sacrament of salvation. Love of society and commitment to the common good are an excellent form of charity, which not only affects relationships between individuals but also social, economic and political relationships. That is why the Church proposed to the world the ideal of a “civilization of love.” “Love for the integral good, inseparable from love for truth, is the key to authentic development”¹⁷⁹.

To live our poverty faithfully and joyfully, we will have to ask ourselves what the Lord is asking of us. We religious, obviously, have to love and serve everyone, rich and poor; but we have to proclaim in the name of Christ that the rich must help the poor, respect them, promote them. In addition, we cannot stop promoting selfless solidarity and that the economy and finances be governed by an ethical approach which favors human beings¹⁸⁰. It is not enough to propose the social doctrine of the Church and the social meaning of goods, but, in addition, we, with a prophetic sense, have to live poverty and rethink the economy of the Order.

As has already been indicated, our Constitutions indicate the purpose of the common goods and, always under the responsibility of the superiors and their councils, they leave the management of the properties and goods of the provinces and of the Order to the respective treasurers. And the Constitutions also set some criteria on the use of goods by religious, exhorting them to share them with the poor. However, there is no limit to the possessions of the provinces and the Order¹⁸¹. For this reason, an update is necessary that complies with the criteria indicated in the document *The economy at the service of the charism and mission*¹⁸².

¹⁷⁸ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 55-58; PEDRO JOSÉ GÓMEZ SERRANO, *El consumo que consume. Consumismo y pobreza evangélica* en Frontera Hegian 87 (Vitoria 2015)

¹⁷⁹ CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Oeconomicae et pecuniariae quaestiones. Considerations for an ethical discernment on some aspects of the current economic and financial system* (January 6, 2018) 2.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 58; Cf. Id. *General Audience* (August 19, 2020).

¹⁸¹ Cf. *Constitutions* 49-57; 473-495.

¹⁸² CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission. Boni dispensatores multiformis gratiae Dei* [1P 4,10]. *Orientaciones* (2018).

Poverty commits us to an assiduous efforts of discernment so that, in coherence with the charism, the apostolic works continue to be effective means of making God's mercy reach many. The apostolic works and institutions proper to the Order (educational centers, temples, buildings, houses of formation) are not only a means to ensure the sustainability of the institute itself, but also belong to the fruitfulness of the charism. This implies asking ourselves whether or not our works manifest the charism that we have professed, whether or not they fulfill the mission entrusted to us by the Church. The main criterion for evaluating the works is not their profitability, but their correspondence with the charism and mission that the Order is called to carry out. Being faithful to the charism requires acts of courage: it is not about selling everything or giving up all works, but about seriously discerning, keeping our eyes fixed on Christ and our ears attentive to his Word and to the voice of the poor. In this way, our works can, at the same time, be fruitful for the Order's projects and express God's predilection for the poor¹⁸³.

All of this implies rethinking the economy, through a careful reading of the Word of God and of History. Listen to the whisper of God and the cry of the poor, the old poor and the new poor; understand what the Lord is asking today and, after having understood it, act with that courageous trust in the Father's providence (cf. Mt 6,19), which the Augustinian Recollects have had at so many moments in t history.

It is true that there are problems derived from the advanced age of many religious and from the complex management of some works, but availability to God will make us find solutions. It may be that discernment suggests rethinking a work that may have become too large and complex; perhaps forms of collaboration can be found with the laity, the diocese or some religious congregation; or if it is possible, to transform the same work so that it continues, although with other modalities, as a work of the Church. For all these reasons, communication and collaboration within the Order, as well as with the Augustinian Recollect Family and the local Church, is important. Within the Order, the various provinces cannot be conceived in a self-centered way, as if each one lived for itself; nor can general governments ignore the different peculiarities¹⁸⁴.

¹⁸³ Cf. FRANCIS, *Message to the Second Symposium on the Theme: "Rethinking of the Economy in fidelity to the Charism"*, Roma (November 25, 2016); FERNANDO TORRES, "Es el momento de otra visión y organización de la economía" en *Vida Religiosa. Monográfico 2/2020/ vol.128*; ENRIQUE LLUCH FRECHINA, *Transformar la economía desde el Evangelio. De una economía de la codicia a una economía solidaria* en *Frontera Hegian 89* (Vitoria 2015)

¹⁸⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Message to the Second Symposium on the Theme: "Rethinking of the Economy in fidelity to the Charism"*, Roma (25 de noviembre de 2016).

4.6. Integral ecology and evangelical poverty

If we want to live evangelical poverty and opt for the poor, we will have to be aware that the degradation of the Earth has irreparable consequences, especially for the poorest. Our mistreated land requires an “ecological conversion”, a “change of course”, so that man assumes the responsibility of “caring for the common home”.

God has not only created everything that exists, but also reveals himself to us and is given to us in Jesus Christ. Therefore, from the viewpoint of faith there is an interrelation between nature and man. Hence “in addition to the ecology of nature, there is an ecology that we can call ‘human’, and which in turn requires a ‘social ecology’”¹⁸⁵.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the desolation created by terrorism, wars and famines have given us clear signals about the vulnerability and fragility of our modern world, strengthening the prophetic words of Pope Francis on the need to care for Mother Earth.

From our faith in Jesus, we want to hear the “cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”¹⁸⁶. From this listening in the light of faith, Pope Francis, in the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, invites us to reflect on Creation as a common home; the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet; the conviction that everything in the world is connected; criticism of the forms of power derived from technology, which ignore the common good and act unethically; the search for other ways of understanding the economy and progress; the recognition of the value of each person and the human sense of ecology; the rejection of the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle¹⁸⁷.

Ecology considers the relationships between living organisms and the environment where they grow. When one speaks of “environment”, one particular relationship is referred to, the one that exists between nature and the society which lives in it. This prevents us from understanding nature as something separate from us or as a mere setting in which we live. We are included in it, we are part of it and thus in constant interaction with it. Given that everything is closely related, and that current problems require a look that takes into account all the factors of the global crisis, *Laudato si'* proposes an integral ecology that clearly incorporates the human and social dimensions¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (2009) 51; cf. FRANCIS, *Querida Amazonia* (2020) 41.

¹⁸⁶ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 49; cf. JAAZEAL JAKOSALEM, “Grito de la tierra, clamor de los pobres”, en Agustinos Recoletos, *Programa de formación permanente 2020: Profetas del Reino 10*.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 16.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 137-139.

If there are no ethics or morals in the use of natural resources and in the protection of the environment, not only is Creation destroyed, but also the deterioration of the quality of human life and social degradation. "If we take into account that human beings are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with a unique dignity, we cannot fail to consider the effects of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture"¹⁸⁹.

The human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together. We cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation. In fact, the deterioration of the environment and that of society affect the most vulnerable people on the planet in a special way: "Both everyday experience and the common experience of ordinary life and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest people"¹⁹⁰.

And not only that. Pope Francis goes on to warn us that there is usually no clear awareness of the problems that particularly affect the excluded. Yet they are the majority of the planet's population, billions of people. Today they are mentioned in international political and economic discussions, but one often has the impression that their problems are brought up as an afterthought, a question which gets added almost out of duty or in a tangential way, if not treated merely as collateral damage. Indeed, when all is said and done, they frequently remain at the bottom of the pile¹⁹¹.

We, the Augustinian Recollects, cannot remain locked in our small selfish world and not have a global vision of reality to assume our responsibility and speak out in defense of the poor, the weak and the vulnerable, in a debate often dominated by more powerful interests. "We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social, behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference"¹⁹². For this reason, it is a good for humanity that believers better recognize the ecological commitments that spring from our faith. The destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: "All things have been created through Him and for Him" (Col 1:16)¹⁹³.

Faced with so many needs and cries of anguish that well up from the heart of the exploited and impoverished peoples, we can respond through social organizations, technical resources, debate fora, political programs, and all of this can be part of the solution. But we, as Christians, cannot renounce the

¹⁸⁹ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 43.

¹⁹⁰ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 48.

¹⁹¹ Cf. FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 49.

¹⁹² FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 52.

¹⁹³ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 99.

proclamation of the Gospel and the task of proposing the liberating encounter with Jesus Christ. Pope Francis has repeatedly affirmed that the Church is not a business, nor is it a humanitarian agency or an NGO: the Church is sent to lead everyone to Christ and his Gospel¹⁹⁴.

And for us religious, the experience of poverty should involve us in caring for all of Creation and motivate us to engage in an ongoing formation on integral ecology, so as to understand that the environment is a gift from God and a common heritage that must be cared for, not destroyed. Integral ecology can be a way of love that allows us to feel poor and grateful before God.

Problems can become real opportunities to discover that we are one human family. The Holy Spirit is the architect of communion: He is the one who opens the closure of our hearts and enlightens us to recognize our mistakes, inspires us to ask for and grant forgiveness for having allowed ourselves to be carried away by logics that divide, starve, isolate and condemn. If we were able to apologize to the poor and the excluded, then we would also be able to sincerely repent for the damage done to the common home¹⁹⁵.

Five years after the encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis has signed the document *On the way to the care of the common home*, prepared by the interdicasterial consultation group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, containing a total of 227 proposals of dealing with Creation.

The first part, "Education and ecological conversion", opens with the call to conversion and a change of mentality that leads to the care of life and Creation, to dialogue with the other and to becoming aware of the deep connection between the world's problems. It is proposed to protect life and promote the family, the centrality of the school and the university, catechesis, ecumenical dialogue and communication¹⁹⁶.

The second part of the document deals with the issue of food and the reference to the words of Pope Francis: "The food that is thrown away is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor"¹⁹⁷. Hence the condemnation of food waste as an act of injustice, the invitation to promote "diversified and sustainable" agriculture. There is also a strong call to combat phenomena such as land grabbing, large polluting agro-industrial projects, and for biodiversity to be protected. Echoes of this appeal are also found in the chapter on water, access to which is "an essential human right." Along the same lines is the call to reduce pollution, to decarbonize the energy and economic sector, and to

¹⁹⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *General Audience* (October 23, 2013); *A Message to the Participants of the IV World Forum of Catholic Inspired NGOs* (December 7, 2019).

¹⁹⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, *Una gran esperanza. La custodia de la Creación* (Città del Vaticano 2019) 31-64.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. TAVOLO INTERDICASTERIALE DELLA SANTA SEDE SULL'ECOLOGIA INTEGRALE: *In cammino per la cura della casa comune. A cinque anni dalla Laudato si'* (18 de junio de 2020).

¹⁹⁷ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 50.

invest in clean and renewable energy, accessible to all. Finally, it addresses the issue of climate, aware that it has a profound environmental, ethical, economic, political and social relevance, which affects especially the poorest: therefore, a “new development model” is needed that links synergistically the fight against climate change and the fight against poverty, in tune with the Social Doctrine of the Church¹⁹⁸.

From the viewpoint of our faith and our poverty, “Our attitude toward the present state of our planet should indeed make us concerned for and witnesses to the gravity of the situation. We cannot remain silent before the outcry when we realize the very high costs of the destruction and exploitation of the ecosystem. This is not a time to continue looking the other way, indifferent to the signs that our planet is being plundered and violated by greed for profit, very often in the name of progress. We have the chance to reverse course, to commit ourselves to a better, healthier world and to pass it on to future generations. Everything depends on us, if we really want it”¹⁹⁹.

Listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and the peoples with whom we walk, calls us to a true integral conversion, with a simple and frugal life, of union with Christ and fidelity to the Spirit. A prayerful reading of the Word of God will help us to deepen and discover the groanings of the Spirit and will enlighten us in a process of personal and community conversion, a conversion of the mind and heart, that commits us to relate harmoniously with the creative work of God, which is the “common home”²⁰⁰.

4.7. A story to tell, a history to build

It is clear that our engagement with the poor did not just start now. Rather, today we need to awaken the missionary spirit, encourage the desire to go where the Church needs us and continue walking with the poor. Faced with the new social challenges, we have to respond from the vitality of the charism and the strength of the Gospel, breaking the mold and joining forces in a network of charity in solidarity. Life becomes history. We have a story to tell and we have a history to build²⁰¹.

Let us remember those brothers and sisters, who, seeing the needs of their time and moved by charity, helped the poor. Let us think of Saint Nicholas of

¹⁹⁸ Cf. TAVOLO INTERDIOCESANALE DELLA SANTA SEDE SULL’ECOLOGIA INTEGRALE: *In cammino per la cura della casa comune. A cinque anni dalla Laudato si* (18 de junio de 2020).

¹⁹⁹ FRANCIS, *Letter to the President of the Republic of Colombia on the occasion of the World Environment Day* (June 5, 2020).

²⁰⁰ Cf. SPACIAL SYNOD OF BISHOPS FOR THE PAN-MAZONIC REGION, “The Amazon: new paths for the Church and for an integral ecology” (October 6-27, 2019) *Final Document* 17-18; Cf. FRANCIS, *Querida Amazonia* (2020).

²⁰¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* 110.

Tolentine, who went out of his way to give bread, love and hope with joy²⁰²; Saint Thomas of Villanova, “father of the poor”²⁰³; Saint Ezekiel Moreno, who welcomed the poor in the Philippines, fed those who came begging to the convent in Monteagudo, and was moved by the sight of the poor while traveling the Llanos de Casanare, in Colombia²⁰⁴; Bishop Ignacio Martínez, who, with admirable charity and sacrifice, evangelized the igarapés of the Purús river, in Amazonas (Brazil)²⁰⁵; Blessed Mother Mary of Saint Joseph, who said to her sisters: “Those that nobody wants to receive, those are ours”²⁰⁶; Bishop Alfonso Gallegos, who went out of his way for Hispanic immigrants and advocated for the future of young people in depressed areas of the United States²⁰⁷; the missionaries from China: Mariano Gazpio²⁰⁸ and Esperanza Ayerbe²⁰⁹, apostles in what is now Shangqiu, China; Sr. Cleusa, an Augustinian Recollect missionary, who died in 1985 defending the indigenous people in the prelatore of Labrea²¹⁰, and many others.

Our mission is supported by the effective prayer of our contemplative sisters. Let us remember the founding efforts of Mother Mariana de San José and Mother Antonia de Jesús in Spain²¹¹, and of Mother Guadalupe Vadillo in Mexico²¹². Charismatic vitality that today is manifested in the foundations of Costa Rica, Colombia, Guatemala, Brazil, Kenya, the Philippines and the United States. We have the faithful support of the secular fraternities and the enthusiasm of the youth of the JAR; All of them, with their prayer and joy, arouse missionary hope and allow us to dream of a renewed social commitment.

When considering a social work carried out in past times or even in the present, it is usually identified and attributed to the person who has directed it or has taken the initiative, but it was not only he, or she, who carried it out; Let us think of the religious community that supported and sustained them, and, especially, let us value and admire the collaboration of the benefactors and the

²⁰² Cf. PABLO PANEDAS GALINDO, *El Santo de la Estrella. San Nicolás de Tolentino* (Madrid 2005); LUCIANO RADI, *San Nicola da Tolentino* (Torino 2004).

²⁰³ Cf. MIGUEL SALÓN, *Vida de Saint Thomas of Villanova, Arzobispo de Valencia. Ejemplo y norma de obispos y prelados* (El Escorial 1925); VARIOS, *Ponencias del Congreso Saint Thomas of Villanova, postulado como Doctor de la Iglesia* (Valencia 23-25 de enero, 2018) en “Cuadernos de Investigación histórica” 35 (2018); ISAAC GONZÁLEZ MARCOS (ed.), *Saint Thomas of Villanova. 450 Aniversario de su muerte* (Madrid 2005).

²⁰⁴ Cf. ÁNGEL MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *Beato Ezequiel Moreno. El camino del deber* (Roma 1975); Id. *Ezequiel Moreno. Santo de tres continentes* (Madrid 2006).

²⁰⁵ Cf. TEODORO CALVO MADRID, *El Apóstol del Amazonas. El siervo de Dios Mons. Ignacio Martínez* (Monachil 2005).

²⁰⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Homily on the Beatification* (May 7, 1995).

²⁰⁷ Cf. JOHN OLDFIELD, *Alfonso Gallegos. Con los ojos del corazón* (Madrid 2020).

²⁰⁸ Cf. JOSÉ JAVIER LIZARRAGA, *Un camino de fidelidad. Mariano Gazpio, agustino recoleto* (Marcilla 2019); Id. *Mariano Gazpio. Siervo bueno y fiel* (Madrid 2015).

²⁰⁹ Cf. MARINA GARCÍA, *Esperanza Ayerbe. Misionera contemplativa* (Madrid 2016).

²¹⁰ Cf. ROSALINA MENEGHETTI, *Cleusa Carolina Rody Coelho. Sangre derramada* (Madrid 2015).

²¹¹ Cf. JESÚS DIEZ RASTRILLA, *Mariana de San José. Mística y fundadora* (Madrid 2017); SANTIAGO MARTÍNEZ LÁZARO, *Antonia de Jesús. La hormiguilla de Dios* (Madrid 2018).

²¹² Cf. ÁNGEL MARTÍNEZ CUESTA, *Agustinas Recoletas. Fidelidad carismática* (1993).

faithful people who have made it possible with their work, financial contribution and effort.

Before taking a brief tour of the twentieth century, let us look at two social works of the past in which charity displays originality and opens up ways to overcome need with a vision of the future.

4.7.1. Evangelization of the island of Negros, in the Philippines (1848-1898)

In the 19th century, the main contribution of the Order to the progress of the Philippine archipelago was the evangelization and development of the island of Negros. In 1848, when it was entrusted to our care, the island had not much of importance. Its one hundred thousand inhabitants, scattered over mountains and rice fields, managed to survive by farming. Fifty years later, it was one of the most flourishing islands in the Philippine archipelago, with a population close to half a million inhabitants, distributed in 47 villages and attended by more than seventy religious. The sugar harvest rose from 189 tons in 1848, to more than 110,000 tons in 1898. Simultaneously, and closely connected with this phenomenon, was the significant improvement in religious care, catechesis, the primary education, health and communications.

Outstanding architects of this spectacular progress were the missionaries. Fernando Cuenca (1824-1902), parish priest of Talisay from 1849 until his death, was the one who promoted this project. At first he devoted his energies to getting people to settle in newly established villages. Then he thought about roads and the cultivation of sugar cane, a concern that took up the best years of his life. He personally built and installed the hydraulic press to the sugar cane mill.

In 1898, when the revolution forced the religious to leave Negros, the Order did not have any possessions on the island, despite the hundreds of thousands of hectares that it had helped distribute among hundreds of farmers.

4.7.2. The *Fazenda do Centro* (Espírito Santo, Brazil)

The progressive impoverishment of the fields in the State of Espírito Santo (Brazil) forced the settlers to seek other lands. Father Manuel Simón (1862-1937) set out to help settlers in the municipalities of Anchieta and Guarapari to find other lands. Soon he found an old farm, abandoned as a result of the abolition of slavery in 1888. It measured almost fifteen thousand hectares, it was located in the municipality of Castelo. He immediately realized its value and looked

for how to raise funds to buy a part. During the canonical visitation of 1908, he discussed the idea with the prior provincial, who was amenable to the idea.

In 1909 the first two lots were purchased. After overcoming many difficulties, the provincial council took over the operation and in 1914 a foundation was formed. At that time, the hacienda had been reduced to 6,118 hectares, of which the province reserved 630. The remaining 5,488 were divided into lots of 50 hectares, which were awarded to as many families under favorable conditions. The settler had to make the payment effective within ten years, with the first payment due in the fifth year after the signing of the contract. In the first two years they could count on the help of the religious, who took charge of their sustenance. In 1998, one of these settlers remembered with nostalgia the family atmosphere that prevailed among them: "We lived here like irmãos, in an atmosphere of fraternity where everything was shared." The Fazenda became the most important socio-economic center in the region. Starting in 1916, the Recollects also turned it into an important evangelizing focus, travelling the whole length and breadth of it, and endowing it with twelve chapels.

4.7.3. Social Apostolate in the last century

Now let's look at the 20th century. Throughout this period, the Augustinian Recollects have been close to those in need although a coordinated approach was lacking due to the large number of ministries and the shortage of religious. There are works begun a long time ago and still continue today, others have been relinquished or have changed orientation. The effort to improve the quality of life of the people has been constant. In addition to building churches, the missionaries have promoted the construction and maintenance of schools, medical clinics, housing developments, social centers and parish soup kitchens²¹³.

In the field of Education

In Panama, in order to protect its own culture, a school was established in Kankintú that today offers university studies. In Brazil, free schools were opened in Ribeirão Preto and in the La Rocinha favela in Rio de Janeiro. Currently, socially oriented schools continue to be administered in Rio de Janeiro (Vidigal favela) and Breves (Marajó). In the Philippines, scholarships were offered to students and housing was provided for teachers. The Bacolod University undertook an ambitious social project in the Handumanan barangay, which included a school, housing and a health center. We must mention the work that since 1966 the Ciudad de los Niños de Cartago (Costa Rica) has been carrying out

²¹³ We extract relevant data from the compiled materials done by Ángel Martínez Cuesta for the vol. III of the *Historia de los Agustinos Recoletos*.

in the formation of children and young people with limited resources. In Sierra Leone (1996), village teachers receive their compensation from the religious community.

Social and pastoral projects

In Colombia, in the missions of Tumaco (1899-1947), thanks to the tenacious work of Father Bernardo Merizalde over 20 years, the Recollects introduced the cultivation of rice and gave impetus to the construction of the railway, the layout of a highway to Pasto, the opening of navigational routes by sea, river and air, the installation of the telegraph and, above all, the opening of several educational centers. In 1947 this mission was turned over to others.

In many of our ministries in Colombia and Venezuela "Santa Rita Workshops" were opened, which created a spirit of solidarity among the faithful and distributed thousands of articles of clothing to the poor. The most active were those of Manizales (1909), where twelve teams were already operating in 1926, and Caracas (1936).

In Peru, missionaries from Chota have promoted the creation of savings and credit cooperatives. Their work has also been effective in the social promotion of the peasants and, especially, of women. Projects have been carried out to build kitchens and to improve homes.

In the prelature of Bocas del Toro (Panama) the inculturation effort of the missionaries is notable, developing an integral evangelization among the Guaymi respecting their cultural values. Also within this prelature, we make mention of the expertise of Father Corpus López de Ciordia, in the layout of the Almirante highway and the construction of roads, bridges and aqueducts.

In Brazil, for years they have been working on the pastoral care of the land, indigenous pastoral care and the integral development of the Amazon. A nutrition, prevention, and education program was also launched which has contributed to reducing infant mortality. Projects have been carried out for the construction of social housing. In 1993 the Esperanza centers were started in the prelature of Labrea to promote social and youth pastoral care. These centers have the support of the Secular Fraternity of Lodosa (Spain), established as an NGO in 1994, which organizes markets and collects funds with simplicity and a sense of solidarity.

Sponsorships, sometimes discussed, are still a great help today for many families to support and educate their children.

In the field of Health Care

In Venezuela, the lepers of Cabo Blanco and Providencia Island were treated. Also in the prelature, the Hansenians are pastorally accompanied and their

integration promoted. In Mexico City, since 1996 the sick at the General Hospital have been spiritually cared for. Moral and material help to cancer patients in Colombia through the “San Ezequiel Moreno” association (since 1976), which has branches in thirty cities in the country. The collection of medicines and the care of parish dispensaries continues to be promoted in several countries.

However, we must recognize that the effectiveness of almost all these initiatives has been seriously jeopardized by the following: shortage of qualified personnel, discontinuity of the processes and lack of common planning.

4.7.4. A history yet to unfold

Since 1994, the financial aid that the NGO Haren Alde has provided for 25 years has been significant. This association, promoted by the Order, has sought to show the social dimension of the Augustinian Recollect charism and has financially supported nearly 300 social projects. It has had religious very dedicated in its direction and has facilitated the collaboration of professional lay people and volunteers. The projects have been maintained and financed with contributions from Spanish public entities and donations from benefactors. In 2018 its ceased to operate and it was decided to establish an Augustinian Recollect solidarity network to organize and promote solidarity work in each country.

In recent years, new social works have been started: in Brazil, the Belén de Pará Social Center (2003), which provides a health care service with fifteen specialties, social assistance, volunteering and training projects. On August 27, 2008 the Lar Santa Mónica was inaugurated in Fortaleza, for the care and support of vulnerable girls. In Mexico City, since 2006, the CARDI (Centro Agustino Recolecto de Desarrollo Integral) offers a volunteer program, while providing care and support to the families of patients at the General Hospital and the Children’s Hospital. In Panama: in 2014 the Food Bank was created in the San Lucas parish, which currently has the support of four hundred charities. In Sierra Leone, the Kamalo and Kamabai secondary schools have been built. In 2016, the Order assumed a missionary area in Cuba that serves four parishes in the diocese of Holguín (Banes, Antilla, Tacajó and Báguanos). In 2017 solidarity aid with Venezuela was intensified, due to the social and political situation in the country.

We have to recognize the collaboration and responsibility of the laity, who with their economic contributions and their work are in solidarity with the poor. It is worth highlighting their solidarity work in the Caritas groups, in volunteering, in attending canteens and medical dispensaries, in social projects and in the social pastoral activity carried out in the parishes of various countries. And

we must also acknowledge and be thankful for the dedicated and quiet work carried out today by so many religious who rely on the laity and go out of their way to walk with the poor and promote integral development and care for Creation.

In our own country we note the rise of volunteer service and missionary volunteering. This social service requires openness, trust and dedication on our part²¹⁴. It is not enough to send volunteers, youth or adults, to a ministry to work; Today we need training, identification with social work and a willingness to be in solidarity to carry out a humanizing service from the starting point of faith, respecting people and their culture. To promote volunteerism, it is necessary to be welcoming, be organized and have the life witness of the religious communities.

In 2017 the International Augustinian Recollect Solidarity Network (ARCORES) was created in order to unite efforts throughout the Augustinian Recollect Family, to promote the organization of the social apostolate in each country and to create a conscience of solidarity in all our communities and ministries.

Faced with the challenges we have today to be evangelizing communities, to live poverty, to revitalize the charism with renewed fidelity, to be in solidarity with the poor and to care for the common home, let us not stop remembering the past with gratitude, let us live the present with missionary passion and embrace the future with renewed hope²¹⁵.

²¹⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* 106.

²¹⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, *Letter to the Consecrated Persons* (2014) I, 1-3.



Augustinians Recollects in Pontianak (Indonesia)

Favela of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil)



5

Guidelines for living poverty

The vow of poverty is today a sign of coherence, freedom of spirit and apostolic availability. Let us remember the words of Saint Paul VI in Medellín. “We are being very much observed: ‘spectaculum facti sumus’ (1 Cor. 4, 9): the world is watching us today, in a particular way in relation to poverty, to the simplicity of life, to the degree of trust that we place in our use of temporal goods”²¹⁶.

In all the countries where we are, with their own cultural and social peculiarities, indifference and the throwaway culture infect us as if it we were dealing with a pandemic. Tension grows between the individual religious and the community. The desire for self-fulfillment sometimes collides with community projects. The search for personal well-being, be it spiritual or material, hinders the experience of poverty and dedication to the service of the common mission. Finally, certain excessively subjective visions of the charism and apostolic service weaken the common projects and team work²¹⁷.

We have become used to grandiose statements, to remembering stories from the past, expressing good intentions. But when it comes to living in poverty, we cannot be content with beautiful theories or doctrinal postulates. We will have to recover the restlessness and tension so we can enter into processes of personal conversion and transformation of the structures of the Order.

We know, and we know it very well, that the happiness and joy that spring from the heart are not born from possessing or desiring great things that exceed our capacity, but from feeling poor before God and close to those in need. We need to “rekindle” the joy, availability and radicalism of evangelical poverty, to hear the cry of the needy and the voice of Christ in them. We will be believable

²¹⁶ PABLO VI, *Homily* Inauguration of the II CELAM Assembly (August 24, 1968).

²¹⁷ Cf. CIVCSVA, *At the Service of Authority and Obedience* (2008) 3.

if we are coherent and if we transmit the mercy and peace of the Lord from the depths of our heart.

I now wish to make some concrete proposals and offer - for the better government of the Order - some guidelines that promote poverty of spirit and a predilection for the poor. If there are no gestures, decisions and bold changes in each one and in the structures of the Order, we will not live in poverty or find the way to true joy.

5.1. Personal Plan of Action

Poverty of spirit is a gift of the Holy Spirit. There is no magic formula or recipe. It is time to discern and risk. There is no such thing as a typical poverty, but there is a mood and a way of being poor marked by charism, family, formation, culture and personal experiences. Pope Francis invites us "to sow concern about poverty and to have the courage to constantly question ourselves about our lifestyle"²¹⁸.

With the desire to engage everyone into personal and community discernment, let me propose some questions to be thought out under the light of the Gospel:

1s. Let us have the courage to ask the Lord to grant us the grace to be able to joyfully live the vow of poverty. To advance in "Poverty of spirit", humility, simplicity, recognizing the gifts of others, appreciating evangelical realities such as "the hidden life with Christ in God," respect for the hidden sacrifice, giving value to the least ones, dedication to efforts that are neither recognized nor paid -- these are all unifying elements of fraternal life and spring from the poverty professed"²¹⁹. There is a need to sincerely consider what I lack and what I have too much of in order to live with poverty the charism and mission of my vocation. At this moment in my life, what is my availability to go to the poorest places? I must ask myself what I specifically do to serve the brothers of the community where I am and what is my relationship with the situations of poverty of the vulnerable people in my environment.

2nd. The seriousness of the ecological and social crisis that we are living today requires all of us to take care of our common home. Pope Francis, in 'Laudato si', proposes us to "move from consumption to sacrifice, from greed to generosity, from waste to the ability to share, in an asceticism that

²¹⁸ FRANCIS, *Meeting with the Generals Superior* (November 29, 2019).

²¹⁹ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Fraternal Life in Community* 44.

means learning to give, and not simply renouncing. It is a way of loving, of moving little by little from what I want to what God's world needs. It is liberation from fear, from greed, from dependency"²²⁰.

3rd. By profession of the vow of poverty, each of us has renounced personal property. By solemn profession we renounce in perpetuity all dominion over property, and even the ability to acquire other properties. In the possession of goods, not only the religious, but also superiors and the community itself have the responsibility to act with diligence²²¹. We have renounced the "private use and usufruct" of the goods and the free use of money, unless the prior temporarily entrusts a specific service. No religious is allowed to possess and accumulate money from personal donations, publications, masses, monthly fees or surplus from vacations. We all have to be held accountable. In the cases in which a religious has to open an account to receive pensions or carry out economic operations, he must do so with the written permission of the major superior, also include, if possible, the signature of the local treasurer, and render accounts in a formal manner periodically.

4th. In the provinces the practice of giving religious a modest monthly amount for incidental personal expenses has spread. What started with a detail has become in some parts a requirement to have money for private use. An amount is also established for vacations with the family. It is hard to understand that, when there is so much poverty, the religious have a "personal fund" that allows personal autonomy and accumulation, without being held accountable. The provincial chapters and directories will have to be precise in this matter, to avoid accumulation.

5th. Our poverty is not just not owning anything personal, but mainly in not having our heart attached to anything, which is the end for which external poverty is ordered²²². We do little by depriving ourselves of money, if we embitter our lives wishing to have objects, titles, acknowledgements and privileges. It is not appropriate for people who have given up their lives, and want to live in poverty, to privately own goods, or withhold goods secretly to feel secure, or give gifts to others with the purpose of ingratiating themselves with them.

6th. In the initial and ongoing formation of the Order - also in our educational centers and ministries - adequate formation in the social doctrine of the Church is necessary²²³ and to encourage a renewed commitment to the

²²⁰ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 9; cf. *Ibid* 201.

²²¹ Cf. *Code of Canon Law* c. 600; *Constitutions* 54.

²²² Cf. *Forma de vivir* 4,1; *Constitutions* 47-55.

²²³ BENEDICT XVI, *Inaugural Address in Aparecida* (13 de mayo de 2007) 3.

poor and to the care of Creation.

7th. A characteristic of poverty in the Order is that of requesting, when something is needed, either from the prior or the treasurer. The treasurers are to be respectful with the religious and ensure that they may have enough money to cover an unforeseen situation; later, the religious is to give an account of the money received²²⁴. Distrust or narrow-mindedness on the part of the treasurer are of no help to anyone, nor is the attitude of the brother who wants to spend without being accountable.

8th. When a religious sees his parents or family in need, confidently go to the Major Superior and explain the situation to him. It is not the religious on his own who must obtain money to help his family. This discernment corresponds to the Major Superior with his council, who will help those who really need it, avoiding privileges²²⁵.

9th. We must think and understand that my needs are not the needs of all, and less of those who do not have what is necessary to live. Let's think about the car models we buy, the number of electronic devices we have for personal use and the desire to own the latest models, looking for reasons to justify our choice, without worrying about the cost or how much it is going to be used.

10th. We have to discern with a spirit of faith, and moral criteria, how to free ourselves from the new dependencies that arise from the misuse of means that facilitate our life and apostolic work: internet and social networks, television or credit card, among others. Also in this respect we need asceticism and responsibility, so as not to waste time or shirk work and pastoral service.

11th. Poverty requires self-control, asceticism and acting responsibly to deprive ourselves of what is harmful to health, such as tobacco or alcoholic beverages, and not to be carried away compulsively by consumer objects, in the face of fashions and the ease of buying online without need.

12th. It is hard to understand how a religious who has chosen poverty does not strive to be polite, take care of personal hygiene, dress with dignity, be available for service and take care of what is common to all. Also in these respects we should help each other with fraternal correction, carried out with consideration and always motivated by charity²²⁶.

13th. Each religious will work according to his possibilities and according to the life project and mission of the community. Through work he unites and

²²⁴ Cf. *Constitutions* 54; 478-481.

²²⁵ Cf. *Additional Code* 56.

²²⁶ Cf. SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Rule*, 4, 7-9; *Commentary on Ps.* 50,1; *Constitutions* 17.

serves the brothers, perfects himself, contributes to the economy of the community and associates himself with the creative work of God²²⁷. It is not a question of making money, but of service and personal commitment. As the poor we want to be, we will need to take into account the hours we work and the attitude with which we work.

14th. The community will determine in its Life and Mission Project what will be its social commitment and aid to ARCORES or other charitable institutions. It can help us in straightforward dialogue about poverty, the management of assets, deprivation and economic difficulties that parents, the elderly, students and the sick have.

15th. The communities that serve ministries or educational centers of a higher social level, cannot be considered self-sufficient and ignore the common fund of the province, to which they have to contribute according to what is established in the statute itself. The religious who are in these ministries are not to consider themselves with privileges as regards the use of money, nor _ exempt from rendering accounts. We have been harmed by the permissiveness of superiors and a misconception concerning the economy and poverty in believing that the money we manage we can spend as we please.

16th. Every year, we have a few days of vacation to spend with the family or to rest. It is not appropriate that someone who has made a profession of evangelical poverty _ aspire to a rich man's vacation. There is no coherence between the option of poverty and the desire to visit countries and enjoy a social life typical of well-off people. Under the pretext of feeling liberated and having rich friends, it is easy to identify with their lifestyle and get carried away by worldly criteria that do not fit with the spirit of poverty that we have professed.

17th. In caring for secular fraternities and JAR communities, we must offer with simplicity and clarity, stemming from the experience of the Augustinian Recollect charism, a proposal of liberating poverty that helps them to feel in solidarity with the poor and to commit themselves, as members of the Augustinian Recollect Family, to the social initiatives in which the Order is involved through ARCORES.

²²⁷ Cf. *Constitutions* 53.

5.2. Community process and commitment

We have already indicated that it is not enough to be personally poor if we belong to wealthy institutions that accumulate unlimited assets and guarantee us all the securities and a lifestyle typical of the rich. The poverty lived according to the charism of the Order, questions us not only personally; it also questions the attitudes and behaviors of each of the communities, of each province and of the Order itself.

Fraternal life in community, “as an expression of the union achieved by the love of God, in addition to constituting an essential witness for evangelization, has great importance for apostolic activity and for its ultimate purpose”²²⁸. Religious are asked to be experts in communion²²⁹; Communion requires a positive human relationship, trust, and communication. Today in the Order we need to work as a team to discern, coordinate and assume the operational processes with sustainability and renewed hope. We cannot always be abandoning the projects we have started and starting new ones.

The 55th General Chapter welcomed the proposals that Pope Francis made us: “to be creators of communion”, “to reflect the ideal of the first Christians” and “to be a living prophecy of communion”, so that there is no division, no conflict, no exclusion²³⁰. The evangelizing, transforming work in solidarity commits us to respond in a community way to the existential challenges that arise in the countries and the various situations in which we are present. Fidelity to the charism, the experience of evangelical poverty, charity in solidarity, the preferential option for the poor and care for Creation challenge us and demand a process and a community commitment.

Pope Francis uses the metaphor of the network to express the “union” in the community: “the more cohesive and supportive a community is, the more it is animated by feelings of trust and pursues shared goals, the greater its strength”²³¹. Communion and mission urge us to join forces and to be united in a network, as an Order and as an Augustinian Recollect family. We are aware of the difficulties that arise to “be in a network”, assuming responsibility without protagonism, seeking fraternal communion, making all the resources we have available and. With the power of the Spirit we will be able to perceive the sign of these times and recognize the action of God in the vicissitudes of life.

²²⁸ CIVCSVA, Fraternal Life in Community 2.

²²⁹ Cf. CONGREGACIÓN PARA LOS RELIGIOSOS E INSTITUTOS SECULARES (SCRIS), *Religiosos y promoción humana* (1980) 24; JOHN PAUL II, *Vita consecrata* (1996) 46; FRANCIS, *Carta a los consagrados* (2014) 1, 2.

²³⁰ Cf. FRANCIS, *Address to the Participants of the General Chapter of the Augustinian Recollects* (October 20, 2016).

²³¹ FRANCIS, *Message to the 53rd Social Communications World Day* (24 de enero de 2019).

In the restructuring processes of the provinces, the criterion of attending the missions and being in solidarity with the poor has almost always been included; but little has changed in practice. We will have to ask ourselves why we are more concerned with maintaining well-off ministries than venturing into those in which there are more poor people or which require more work and dedication. Starting from our limitations and poverty, we must discern and make decisions to promote new common pastoral projects and commitment to the poor in each of our districts. We need concrete and real gestures that touch our hearts and pockets. Each community, each parish and each school could be more involved in the social works of the Order and of the corresponding diocese. Over and over, with a prophetic tone, Pope Francis reminds us of the strong phrases of the Holy Fathers, such as Saint John Chrysostom: "Not sharing one's own goods with the poor is stealing from them and taking their lives. The goods we have are not ours, but theirs"²³².

Money is to serve, not to rule. And the temporal goods of the Order, of the provinces and of each community are an instrument at the service of the charism and mission. And, according to the Code of Canon Law, they are also "ecclesiastical goods" (can. 634, 1), understanding by such, goods that belong to public juridical persons (cf. can. 1257 § 1) ordered to an end congruent with the mission of the Church (cf. can. 114 § 1), "so that they may fulfill in the name of the Church the mission entrusted to them while looking to the public good" (can. 116 § 1).

However, immersed as we are in the consumer society, it is difficult for us to understand that the goods of the Order and of each province are ecclesiastical goods. This means that profitability is not the only management criterion; fidelity to the charism, mission and solidarity with the poor must be taken into account. A careful discernment is the means to rethink our economy and what it really means. This is what the following notes are aimed at.

1st. It is useless to consider macroeconomics and the principles of poverty if we do not anchor ourselves and touch base in our own community and in everyday life. Each community of Augustinian Recollects, as the Constitutions indicate, "must be distinguished by honest moderation in everything: it is better to have few needs than to abound in wealth. Not only the religious in particular, but the communities themselves ought to give collective witness to evangelical poverty before the people of God.

²³² FRANCIS, *Message to the Ambassadors of Kirguistán, Antigua, Luxemburgo and Barbuda* (May 16, 2013); SAN JUAN CRISÓSTOMO, *Homilía sobre Lázaro*, 1, 6.

The Order carefully must avoid all kinds of luxury, immoderate profit and accumulation of goods so that poverty may shine always and in everything²³³.

2nd. The Constitutions state that the temporal goods of the Order “are in a certain way sacred” and that “they must be used for the purposes that, in accord with the doctrine of Christ the Lord and the regulation of the Church, make their possession lawful: for divine worship, the maintenance of the houses of formation, the fitting support of the community, the works of the apostolate and to help those most in need”²³⁴.

3°. The General Chapter, which “holds the supreme authority in the institute in accord with the Constitutions” (can. 631 § 1), is responsible for setting the fundamental guidelines in economic-administrative matters for the entire Order²³⁵. The General Chapter will have to discern and decide the modifications it deems necessary in Chapter 9 of the Constitutions and in the management of goods. We highlight the following for their importance and innovation:

- a) Economic Directory: The General Chapter is to approve an *Economic Directory* that, in the light of the experience matured over time, favors the application of measures that are most consistent with the charism of the Order, its mission and the evangelical counsel of poverty²³⁶.
- b) The Chapter may establish the maximum amount for acts of extraordinary administration of each Province, and specify the necessary procedures to be complied with (cf. can. 638 § 1 and can. 1281).
- c) The “Economic and Patrimony Council”, which is already established in the Order as a body that depends on the Prior General and his Council, must carry out its task of guiding the General Council and monitoring the goods of the provinces. These, for their part, also have their “Economic and Heritage Council”. For it to be operational, its functions will be established in the economic Directory of each Province. The provincial economic councils must demand the presentation of accounts and establish an administrative program with the collaboration of lay professionals.

²³³ Constitutions 51.

²³⁴ Constitutions 473.

²³⁵ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 58.

²³⁶ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 58.

- d) It is convenient to establish an administrative procedures manual for works of social relevance²³⁷, as well as internal control procedures, establishing, if that's the case, internal audits²³⁸. We are in different countries and the legislation varies from one to another. Trust requires competence and transparency. Through rules of particular law, forms of internal auditing will be determined that, through a balanced system of preventive authorizations, accountability and successive checks, will allow the councils to oversee the activity of the treasurer, the legal representative and the professionals in charge²³⁹.
- e) The stable patrimony is formed by the real estate and movable assets that guarantee the subsistence of our institutions. The assignment of the different assets to the stable patrimony must be evaluated periodically. Canon law requires the legitimate assignment, regardless of the qualification that the stable patrimony may have in the civil regulations of the different countries. The criteria for the management of stable assets are clearly defined²⁴⁰.
- f) The duty to render accounts. It is the responsibility of the prior general, provincial priors, provincial vicars and local priors, that each community present their accounts clearly and transparently according to the proposed form. Their obligation is to verify and carry out audits to guarantee the good administration and the purpose of the works and institutions. The prior provincial must not allow the community accounts signed only by a single religious to be sent. In countries where the economy is centralized, the provincial treasurer must periodically inform the local prior, the treasurer, and the community of the balance sheet of the educational center or the apostolic work. We all have to be discreet and responsible²⁴¹.
- g) Administrative economic file. The Order and the provinces must have an administrative economic archive (cf. can 1283-1284) to ensure an efficient administrative and accounting organization. The permanent updating of the inventory of real estate and a cataloging and conservation of the deeds and insurance policies will be diligently taken care of²⁴².

²³⁷ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 62.

²³⁸ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 67.

²³⁹ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 59-69.

²⁴⁰ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 38-40; 72.

²⁴¹ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 91.

²⁴² Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 93.

- h) Let us ask ourselves why we insist on maintaining apostolic buildings, works, structures and services that do not respond to current needs. A renewed awareness is necessary to abandon the welfare mentality that covers the losses of a work without solving the management problems and that represents an enormous damage because it dissipates resources that could be used for other charities²⁴³. Let us recall the words of Pope Francis to consecrated persons: "I ask you to work concretely in welcoming refugees, drawing near to the poor, and finding creative ways to catechize, to proclaim the Gospel and to teach others how to pray. Consequently I would hope that the structures can be streamlined, large religious houses repurposed, for works which better respond to the present demands of evangelization and charity, and apostolates adjusted to new needs"²⁴⁴.
- i) In financial investments made with our economic assets, we must always act with ethical and moral criteria even at the cost of obtaining fewer benefits. Although our contribution is no more than a small gesture, superiors and treasurers must demand and guarantee that we do not support associations that go against the dignity of people, promoting the exploitation of the poor, drugs, the sale of weapons and everything that goes against the common good, the environment and an integral ecology²⁴⁵.
- j) The communion of goods requires the contribution to the common good and avoiding parallel economies in the communities, in the provinces and in the Order. Superiors have the obligation to follow up with the help of qualified people, in order to avoid favoritisms and private investments, even if it is for social works.
- k) In the social works promoted by the Order or in which communities or religious participate, we are open to collaborate and establish agreements with bishops, diocesan institutions and other religious congregations promoting communion, evangelization, integral development and solidarity²⁴⁶. Partnerships can also be established with private entities that work hard for the end of poverty and the empowerment of the impoverished. No religious should have accounts in his name or dispose of money from social works, without the explicit permission of the Major Superior and without the supervision of said accounts by the Economic Council, even if the work does not belong to the Order.

²⁴³ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 15.

²⁴⁴ FRANCIS: *Apostolic Letter to all the Consecrated People* (2014), II, 4.

²⁴⁵ Cf. FRANCIS: *Evangelii gaudium* 200-208; *Laudato si'* 154-158.

²⁴⁶ Cf. CIVCSVA, *Economy at the service of the Charism and Mission* 94-95.

4th. "The treasurers carry out their office according to the guidelines and under the supervision of the respective superior, but in such a way that all economic administration, of whatever type, is always carried out with the intervention of the treasurer, who must assist and give his opinion in the councils dealing with economic matters, although without the right to vote"²⁴⁷. It is the responsibility of the major superiors and their councils to make decisions and demand transparency in economic management. In each community, the prior and the local council must also assume this responsibility, informing the local community of the management of the works, schools and parishes that they have entrusted to them.

5th. Responsibility, transparency and trust. The three principles are a requirement of the vow of poverty for all religious, for treasurers and, especially, for those who hold positions of governance in communities, vicariates, provinces and the Order. It is not only a matter for the treasurer or the economic council, but also for the superior, the councils and the entire community. Today we all have to present accounts and comply with civil laws. Accountability and justification should be a reason for trust and a sign of poverty. House accounts that are not included in the province's economy program and are not signed by the superior and the corresponding council should not be accepted. Both the brothers who are in more affluent places and those who are in poorer environments must be held accountable. Transparency in the economy does not hinder generosity, but rather facilitates it and contributes to equitable solidarity without favoritism.

6th. The communion of goods must be effective. For this, it is necessary to establish the legal means to contribute to the stable patrimony of the provinces and so that, when the prior provincial and his council decide, economic assets can be transferred to other vicariates and contribute to the maintenance of formation houses or works in other countries.

7th. The communion of goods also encourages collaboration with the general curia, between the provinces and with the Augustinian Recollect Family, consolidating the ARCORES Augustinian Recollect solidarity network to carry out common social projects in each country and to be in solidarity in emergencies²⁴⁸.

8th. The social apostolate is not exclusive to the religious. We need to become aware that it is a shared mission that requires ecclesial communion, co-responsibility and solidarity. We have to avoid closed groups that are dependent on a few people; we have to be open to intercongregationality,

²⁴⁷ *Constitutions* 476.

²⁴⁸ Cf. *Constitutions* 491-494.

joining forces when needed. In our parishes and educational centers we have to promote Catholic volunteering, offer formation programs and prepare assessable solidarity projects that facilitate personal encounters with the poorest in each country.

9th. The pastor cannot act in the administration of the parish as “owner”, at the expense of the faithful and the community. According to the Code of Canon Law, the council for financial affairs is obligatory in all parishes (c.115.2; cf. c. 492.1). This council can play a particularly important role in growing the culture of stewardship, administrative transparency, and serving the needs of the Church. In particular, transparency has to be understood not only as a formal presentation of data, but mainly as proper information for the community and a useful opportunity to involve it in training²⁴⁹.

10th. The issue of stipends in priestly ministry also affects the personal and communal poverty of the religious community. According to the Instruction “The pastoral conversion of the parish community at the service of the evangelizing mission of the Church”, the offerings for the celebration of the sacraments must be “a free act” on the part of the offerer and not a “price to pay” or a “required contribution”, as if it were a kind of “tax on the sacraments”. In this sense, it is important to sensitize the faithful, so that they voluntarily contribute to the needs of the parish, which belongs to everyone. To achieve this, priests are exhorted to set a virtuous example in the use of money, both with a sober lifestyle and without excesses on a personal level, as well as with a transparent management of parish assets in accordance with the real needs of the faithful, especially the poorest and most needy²⁵⁰.

11th. An Augustinian Recollect educational center cannot have as its purpose the obtaining of economic resources, or to make the building useful. It is not enough to have a school: our educational centers have to be authentically Catholic and Augustinian, with an express evangelizing objective²⁵¹. Evangelical poverty is a reference value for every Christian and, therefore, for Catholic education²⁵². The centers will be governed by their own statutes, approved by the prior provincial with the consent of his council²⁵³

²⁴⁹ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church* (July 20, 2020), 101-107.

²⁵⁰ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *The Pastoral Conversion of the Parish Community in the service of the Evangelizing Mission of the Church* (July 20, 2020), 118-121.

²⁵¹ Cf. FRANCIS, *Post-synod Apostolic Exhortation Christus vivit*, 221-223.

²⁵² Cf. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Congress “Education Today and Tomorrow: A Renewing Passion” (November 21, 2015)

²⁵³ Cf. *Additional Code* 315.

12th. Our educational centers are being challenged to harmonize academic excellence with integral development, educating the mind and the heart²⁵⁴. We cannot do it alone and it is necessary to link with others to offer concrete and contextualized plans, promoting cooperation, global citizenship, care for Creation, justice and solidarity with the poor²⁵⁵. These aspects proposed by the Church, although they have been assumed in a very concrete way in the Constitutions²⁵⁶, still require a change of mentality in many of our centers. If we aspire to a comprehensive education, having fewer religious, we will have to spend more money on our educational evangelizing platforms²⁵⁷, on the training of lay administrators and educators, on the teaching of religion, pastoral care, volunteering, the offer of social assistance and scholarships. To achieve the objectives of our educational centers, the EDUCAR network has been set up.

13th. Poverty and physical frailty are most intensely experienced in illness and in the less active stage, due to advanced age. In these situations new difficulties arise, but from the standpoint of faith it can be a fruitful and apostolic stage through love, prayer and union with the sufferings of Christ. Our poverty and social activities will not be credible if we do not feel involved in caring for the sick in our own community or province. Not only those in charge, but also young people and adults have to serve and express their affection and closeness with them.

14th. Our presence in the missions or in ministries with those in most dire need involves only 8% of the religious of the Order²⁵⁸. It is true that we are younger and older in various parts of the world. But there is something happening when we prefer upper-middle level schools and parishes and our concern is not for the poor. The restructuring that we have been dreaming of for years seems paralyzed and neutralized; it will only have been a small tremor if we do not advance in the transformation process that we need. Can't we make bold decisions with new projects, leaving other projects that diocesan priests or laity can carry out? Pledging our commitment to working for the poor and among the poor can only be achieved through availability, detachment and weakness. Making a clear and firm option for the missions and for the existential peripheries requires the audacity and courage of one who is truly committed to the Kingdom of God.

²⁵⁴ Cf. *Proyecto Educativo Institucional de la Orden de Agustinos Recoletos*, Roma 2015.

²⁵⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, *Message for the Launching of the Global Education Pact* (September 12, 2019).

²⁵⁶ Cf. *Constitutions* 308.

²⁵⁷ Cf. FRANCIS, *Christus vivit*, 221-223.

²⁵⁸ There are 75 religious in Sierra Leone, Cuba, Indonesia, China, Taiwán, in the Vicariate of Trinidad (Colombia), and in the Prelatures of Lábrea (Brasil), Marajó (Brasil), Bocas del Toro (Panamá) and Chota (Perú).

15th. Renewable energy. At the global level, *Laudato si'* insists on the need to progressively replace technologies based on fossil fuel resources, considered pollutants, with renewable energies. We must commit to opting for the energy transition and promoting renewable energies in construction projects, in educational centers, parishes and social works and even in financial investments. Where this is not possible, let us at least look for less harmful alternatives for the environment²⁵⁹.

16th. The Order, the provinces, each religious community, spirituality center, school or parish, we are all called to live in coherence with what is indicated in *Laudato si'*; taking educational and training initiatives in integral ecology, differentiated collection and waste disposal, the use of less polluting means of transport, critical and circular consumption, better energy isolation systems, ethical investment, abolition of disposable plastics, care of green spaces and many others²⁶⁰.

5.3. Augustinian Recollect International Solidarity Network

The Augustinian Recollect Family dreams of being significant in the Church and in the world, announcing the Gospel from the vitality of the charism received. The Spirit unites us with religious, contemplative sisters, feminine congregations, laity of the fraternities and young people of the JAR. It unites us, from diversity and fidelity to our own charism, in listening to the Word and in contemplation, in being creators of communion, in being in solidarity with the poor and in announcing the Gospel with joy and hope.

Based on the concern that arose in the General Chapter of 2016, the Commission for Social Apostolate set about shaping the project of the international solidarity network "ARCORES" to develop the social dimension of the charism in our entire Family. ARCORES offers us the opportunity to overcome frontiers and divisions, to contribute to building peace in a just and caring world. With the strength that comes from the Spirit of Christ and the vitality of the charism that we have received, we can join forces, knowledge and experiences, to prepare and develop projects of solidarity in our own country and in the various places where the Augustinian Recollect Family is present.

Pope Francis some time ago published his encyclical *Laudato si'*, in which he calls every Christian to commit to our world. Because the earth is a work

²⁵⁹ Cf. TAVOLO INTERDICASTERIALE DELLA SANTA SEDE SULL'ECOLOGIA INTEGRALE: *In cammino per la cura della casa comune. A cinque anni dalla Laudato si'* II,3, pág. 133-141.

²⁶⁰ Cf. TAVOLO INTERDICASTERIALE DELLA SANTA SEDE SULL'ECOLOGIA INTEGRALE: *In cammino per la cura della casa comune. A cinque anni dalla Laudato si'*. Conclusión, pág. 217.

of God, created by God. That is why it is our duty to take care of creation and all its inhabitants so that injustices do not occur. The Pope explains that “it is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature”²⁶¹.

This approach, which implies changes in the personal, social and structural dimension, is the one that the international Augustinian Recollect Solidarity Network ARCORES has assumed since its inception.

The task now is to intensify social awareness, creating communion and promoting solidarity in our communities, parishes, schools, universities and centers of spirituality. An integral evangelization is intended in line with the Church and in tune with all of Creation.

As is pointed out in its project description: “ARCORES International envisions a world free of poverty where the promotion of human rights prevails; economic, social and cultural, social justice, solidarity, peace and the integrity of Creation above other economic or political interests, in which all peoples can develop without discrimination of any kind and can exercise its right to share fairly in order to better their situation.

ARCORES makes it possible to take progressive steps towards:

- a) A motivation, and promotion, that awakens, sustains and accompanies social commitment and service to the poor.
- b) Greater coordination of projects, so as to implement common cooperation programs for development.
- c) Animation and organization of work, presences and social action projects in the various countries where the Network is present, with common basic intervention criteria, with shared training processes, and with support in personal and economic resources by the Network.
- d) A promotion of awareness and Education for development (EpD) in collaboration with EDUCAR. One of the common themes in this task will be the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed by the UN in 2015, as requested by the Church through the *Dicastery for the service of integral human development*.

²⁶¹ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 139.

- e) Support and coordination of the emergency campaigns launched by members of the Augustinian Recollect Family.
- f) A coordination of the missionary volunteer programs -national and international- executed by the national ARCORES groups or any of their m.
- g) A common financial responsibility to carry out the common proposals of the Network, together with sufficient economic autonomy to carry out the projects, programs and actions of each organization or entity that is part of the Network.
- h) Efficient governing bodies, with sufficient capacity to define the common lines of work of the Network and to support, encourage, evaluate, challenge and redirect the processes and the implementation of the agreed plans.
- i) An improvement in the indicators of transparency and good governance of the Network, both in its head and in its members.
- j) A commitment to social transformation in order to to develop projects and offer solutions based on knowledge, best practices and models of success.
- k) Counseling to offer concrete opportunities for social commitment, carry out impact evaluations of social works and offer criteria that allow discerning when making delicate decisions in the service of the poor.

“ARCORES International dreams –this is its vision– of a world free of poverty in which the promotion of human rights –economic, social and cultural–, social justice, solidarity, peace and the integrity of creation prevails above other economic or political interests; in which all people and peoples can develop, without any discrimination, and can exercise their right to participate in an equitable way to improve their well-being”²⁶².

ARCORES international has its headquarters in Rome, and its technical office in Madrid. It is a project of communion, which promotes unity in diversity. The purpose is that, in each country where the Order is located, ARCORES be established and seek its resources, develop its projects and be in solidarity with those most in need. The ARCORES International network has adopted as its motto: “Moving hearts, transforming lives”, which summarizes the effective solidarity action that we want, which commits us in what is most essential and aims to engage others as well; that transforms us and wants to be transforming.

²⁶² ARCORES, *Statutes* (Approved by the General Council on October 2, 2017).

From the ARCORES technical office, an accompaniment service is provided to the ARCORES of each country, to encourage coordination spaces and international teams, which mark lines of common action and enhance autonomy and the search for resources and alliances for Network. It seeks to promote the exchange of experiences and resources, the formation of religious and laity, the development of capacities for the Network and the implementation of global actions for the protection of minors and the solidarity heart journey. Technical support actions are also carried out to attract donor partners and entities and to prepare projects.



Ecclesial Community of Rio Acuti Pereira, Portel (Brazil)

6

The Kingdom of God belongs to you

Pope Francis cried out in the Philippines: “The poor are at the center of the Gospel, they are the heart of the Gospel: if we remove the poor from the Gospel, the complete message of Jesus Christ will not be understood”²⁶³. For us religious, this commits us to “live in such a way that the poverty of Christ is reflected in our lives”²⁶⁴. This means “rejecting worldly perspectives and seeing all things anew in the light of Christ; be the first to examine our consciences, recognize our faults and sins, and walk the path of constant conversion, of daily conversion. How can we proclaim to others the novelty and liberating power of the Cross, if we ourselves do not let the Word of God shake our complacency, our fear of change, our small commitments to the ways of this world, our “spiritual worldliness”²⁶⁵.

The Pope has frequently invited all Christians to reflect on worldliness, to which we are not immune. We may think that worldliness is just flippancy or a desire to party, but it is something much deeper: it is a lifestyle that prevents us from seeing the need of others and accepting the Word of God (cf. Lc 8,7). Worldliness is a culture: a culture of the ephemeral, of appearance, of makeup; a culture of “today yes, tomorrow no, tomorrow yes and today no”. Certainly, it has superficial values. But it does not know fidelity, because it changes according to circumstances; negotiates everything. It’s a throwaway culture, based on convenience. A culture without loyalty, without roots. We can say that it is a hermeneutics of life, a way of life, a way of living Christianity²⁶⁶.

²⁶³ FRANCIS, *Homily in the Mass with Bishops, Priests and Religious during the Apostolic Visit to the Philippines* (June 16, 2015, Manila). Cf. *Id. General Audience* (August 19, 2020).

²⁶⁴ FRANCIS, *Homily in the Mass with Bishops, Priests and Religious during the Apostolic Visit to the Philippines* (June 16, 2015, Manila).

²⁶⁵ FRANCIS, *Homily in the Mass with Bishops, Priests and Religious during the Apostolic Visit to the Philippines* (June 16, 2015, Manila).

²⁶⁶ Cf. FRANCIS, *Homily at Santa Marta* (May 16, 2020); HENRI DE LUBAC, *Meditación sobre la Iglesia* (Pamplona 1958).

“The Kingdom of Heaven - Francis says - is the opposite of the superfluous things that the world offers, it is the opposite of a banal life: it is a treasure that renews life every day and expands it towards broader horizons. In fact, whoever has found this treasure has a creative and searching heart, which does not repeat, but rather invents, tracing and traveling new paths that lead us to love God, to love others, to truly love ourselves”²⁶⁷.

Our vow of consecrated poverty and our preferential option for the poor collide with worldliness that takes pleasure in looking the other way so as not to complicate life. We run the risk of locking ourselves up in what is mine and what is ours, in the personal sphere, but also, and in a much more subtle way, in the institutional environment, in the Province or in the Order. And that is manifested very clearly in our experience of poverty.

“Poverty is essential, especially for consecrated life. It has to be noticed in everything. People see it: this one is poor, that one is poor. He does not have superfluous things, he does not live superfluously. Poverty leads you to seek the only wealth that is what the Lord asks of you. It is the richness of discovering that one lives for service... Goods are necessary, certainly, but poverty helps to live closer to the Lord. There is always the temptation to have loopholes, but you have to be careful not to fall into a certain ideologization of poverty. I mean that sometimes people talk about it a lot and don't live that long. It is theorized about it, but our criteria and our actions do not accompany. Poverty has to be lived, and it has to be lived with joy. Poverty is being at the real service of the brothers, getting involved and serving, living simply, without artificial needs, in harmony with creation and with the awakened consciousness of knowing that there are millions of human beings who live, rather, survive with less than what is fair”²⁶⁸.

For the charismatic and missionary revitalization of the Order, it is urgent to recover the prophetic sense of poverty and to feel happy because we have “the same feelings as Jesus Christ” (Phil 2,5). The experience of poverty is not something personal or merely optional for us, but is in the DNA of our being, of our consecration and of our charism. Without poverty lived with humility and joy, we cannot find our own identity, nor the freedom to develop our mission. We would be missing something constitutive.

Pastoral conversion and holiness pass through prayer, poverty and the affective unity of the heart. The truly poor is a man of prayer, because he feels needy before God. The poor feels loved by God, he is happy because he can love and lives with joy. His heart is in God, and in God he finds himself and all

²⁶⁷ FRANCIS, *Angelus* (July 26, 2020).

²⁶⁸ FRANCIS, *La fuerza de la vocación. La vida consagrada hoy. Una conversación con Fernando Prado* (2018) 93-94.

things, gifts of God. The poor man is humble, he feels grateful for everything he receives and is in solidarity with everyone who needs him. "Prayer to God and solidarity with the poor and those who suffer are inseparable. To celebrate a worship that is pleasing to the Lord, it is necessary to recognize that every person, even the most destitute and despised, has the image of God imprinted on them. From such attention derives the gift of divine blessing, attracted by the generosity that is practiced towards the poor"²⁶⁹.

We hear the cry of the poor and of Creation, which is waiting expectantly for redemption. "It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions to restore dignity to the excluded and simultaneously to care for nature"²⁷⁰. We too, from our poverty, can have far-reaching views and promote the integral human development of peoples in charity and truth, commit ourselves to opt for the poor, work for justice and build peace. This kingdom, which has begun, is good seed, it is yeast that leavens the dough and it is new wine that bursts old wineskins. Rejoice, the Kingdom of God belongs to us!

Witnessing to poverty is a blessing and a challenge. It is availability to the Spirit and a process of conversion that leads to a change of conduct felt in concrete decisions and actions. Evangelical poverty unites us to Christ and with the grace of the Spirit disposes us for the fraternal life of our communities, evangelization, pastoral charity, commitment to the environment and care for Creation.

I exhort you fraternally: let us not resist the Spirit, let us open our hearts to discern our motivations, desires and decisions, to seek the happiness that Jesus has promised to those who love him and follow him on the path of evangelical poverty. Let us consider with gratitude and hope what the Lord is doing in each one of us and, through us, in the community, in the Order and in the People of God.

The beatitudes are a declaration of the happiness possessed by those who open themselves to the action of God in an attitude of sincere openness. These are the poor in spirit: those who have placed their trust in the Father and ask him with faith for his Kingdom to come (Mt. 6, 9; Lk. 11, 2). This Kingdom has begun, the Risen Christ is the Lord of History and infuses his Spirit in the hearts of those who love and believe in him. The Kingdom of God is grace and mission. With the grace of the Spirit, Christ dwells in us, inspires us to proclaim the Gospel, gives us the strength to remain faithful in adversity, is with us to the end and promises us fullness of life. "Abandonment to the providence of the

²⁶⁹ FRANCIS, *Message on the occasion of the Fourth World Day of the Poor* (June 13, 2020) 2.

²⁷⁰ FRANCIS, *Laudato si'* 139.

Heavenly Father frees us from anxiety about tomorrow (cf. Mt. 6, 25-34). Trust in God is a preparation for the blessedness of the poor: they shall see God²⁷¹.

Jesus of Nazareth is the fully happy man, the blessed man par excellence, who makes us participants in the happiness of the Kingdom of God. "Jesus, He who is the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value, can do nothing but arouse joy, all the joy in the world: the joy of discovering a meaning for one's own life, the joy of feeling it engaged in the adventure of holiness"²⁷².

Happy are the poor in spirit, those who have a restless heart. If we stop reasoning in terms of accumulation and are capable of intuiting the gratuitousness of God's gifts, we will be able to "know and understand" that spiritual poverty is the key to holiness, apostolic fruitfulness and true happiness.

Rome, August 28, 2020
Solemnity of Saint Augustine

Miguel Miró Miró OAR
Prior General

²⁷¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2547.

²⁷² FRANCIS, *Angelus* (July 26, 2020).



Christ the Redeemer of Corcovado (Brazil)





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