

Options for Life, Life in Abundance: a challenge from Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (G.P.C.I.)

This very relevant topic was the subject and motive for work at the last General Chapter. Working for this goal by responsibility for the safeguarding of creation. An ideal which is put into practice in religious life, particularly by Dominicans. Prayer as an indispensable means. Frugality in personal and community life. A total option for life. In the front line to overcome hunger, poverty, all kinds of marginalisation and violence.

To understand this topic, we have to recall an important moment in history, Vatican Council II, that disconcerting breath of the Spirit which tore vigorously through the Church of the twentieth century, giving birth to a dynamic renewal of life in many different ecclesial, institutional and personal spheres.

The church, as the "universal sacrament of salvation" was understanding herself in the light of Christ as "really and intimately in solidarity with the human race and its history", rediscovering her identity as a significant Word. Her dialogue as a compassionate presence with humanity and the contemporary world extended to declaring that "there is nothing authentically human which does not find an echo in her (the Church's) heart". Moreover, the Church had before her "the world... with



its weaknesses, defeats and victories",¹ and that world was challenging the dynamism of her fraternity and her vocation of communion. The 1971 Synod of Bishops later declared, "Action on behalf of justice, and participation in the transformation of the world, clearly appear to us as constitutive dimensions of the preaching of the Gospel, that is, of the Church's mis-

sion".² A Latin American bishop, Mons. Angelilli, said with wise simplicity, "One ear towards the gospel, the other towards the people".

Following the example of Jesus

The religious life, represented symbolically as being at the heart of the Church, saw itself likewise involved in the dynamic action of the Spirit; and in the light of its charism it turned to focus on radically impassioning itself for the God of the Kingdom and the Kingdom of God, "passion for God and passion for humanity", in faithfulness to its founders and foundresses; it strengthened its conviction that it is part of its fundamental constitution to "make a synthesis between attraction to Jesus and compassion for human beings: this is where God's path and human pathways meet at the



Respect for creation also means to avoid making litter: Sr. M. Auxiliadora (first on the right) with a group of teenagers dedicated to collecting litter and cleaning up the environment (Goiania-Brasil)

crossroads".³ Deepening appreciation of its own vocation-mission brought the knowledge that commitment to justice and peace flourishes as an inevitable consequence of the following of Christ.

We are at the centre of Christian experience, which, in us religious, shapes a way of life and a particular mission, a spirituality, not a fashion or an ideology.

We read in the Instruction "Christ" (*Ripartire da Cristo*): "Those who are consecrated should exert themselves to build a just world which offers new and better possibilities for life and the development of the person. For the effectiveness of this presence it is necessary to be poor in spirit, purified from selfish interests, ready to offer a service of peace, not of violence, a attitude that is supportive and full of compassion".⁴

The Spirituality of GPIC

This spirituality is centred in God's project of LIFE and in our call to continue and collaborate

with his saving mission. It is the "soul" of an evangelical lifestyle which recognises:

- that the Spirit dwells in us and urges us to fidelity to the God of the Kingdom and the Kingdom of God;
- the need for a constant daily conversion, in order to contemplate (gaze attentively) with "the eyes and the heart" of God; because if we want the world to move towards greater justice and peace, we need to start with ourselves. "Lord, what will become of sinners?" wept St Dominic each night...while taking the discipline.
- that we must allow ourselves (especially as Dominicans) to be modelled primarily on the mystery of Jesus' incarnation, in order to "act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly" (Mic 6:8) with this God who made himself last of all, who chose to make himself poor.
- how to face reality from a faith-viewpoint which finds God's traces in history and

sees the Easter mystery at work. Like Dominic, we go to meet our "Cumins" at today's cross-roads and in today's streets; for him it was imperative "to speak to people about God" in order to be able to speak to God about the people he had met.

GPIC as a way of living

GPIC sketches out briefly the fundamental course of religious life, which meets humanity's great challenges with the gospel call to promote justice, peace and the integrity of creation; not as if it were yet another area of work, "something else" to do, but as a way of being which includes both life and mission.

From this point of view, GPIC is a constitutive element of our lives, encompassing the whole of life and touching all its dimensions of prayer, fraternity, vows, formation, government, mission and economic affairs. Its call demands of us a constant conversion of heart, simplicity of life, a compassionate gaze, an active charity, and a constant journeying to the "edges" where all that is human and humanising is at peril. "Let no-one think that religious... make themselves strangers to humanity, and are useless to the world's society"⁵ wrote the Council Fathers, words that reflect a long history of religious life's service of mankind, of promotion of the peoples and their cultures. GPIC is something new – it is always new!

GPIC and charism

This same perception accompanied Mother Géline from her youth onwards; in her life-chang-

ing experience, contemplation of the image of Our Lady of Sorrows and the continuation of its dramatic message in time overlaid and interwove each other. Mary, holding the disfigured and dead body of Jesus: humanity, the suffering and lifeless "Body" of the Word made flesh, continuing to be disfigured and crucified by pain, sin and death... and not only humanity, because the whole of creation is groaning and suffering in labour pains... (cf. Rm 8:22-23).

Let us open our eyes and ears to what is happening around us: on all sides we see a world divided between those who have and those who do not have, north and south, economic interests masked by religious and/or political intolerance; more than a million children who live or work on the streets, the same number of women and children trafficked into prostitution each year; and this infamous list could be followed up by the maltreatment and abuse perpetrated against the planet itself. Just as an example, I point out the s-

candal of the super-abundant riches owned by a few and the fact of more than half the world's population living on less than two dollars a day. According to latest reports, the number of people in the world suffering hunger has risen considerably (1.020 million). Jacques Diouf, director general of the World Food Organisation (FAO), said at the last summit meeting in 2009, "There is no lack of resources. But the nations of the OCDE (Organisation for cooperation and Economic Development) spent 245 million euros each year to support agriculture in countries where farmers represent about 2-4% of the whole population, whereas in Third World countries the rural population is between 60% and 80%... About 900,000 million euros are spent on arms each year. Can we not spend 30,000 million to defend life?"⁶ We know that this appeal came to nothing and was forgotten by the participants and by many others. Have we forgotten it too?

Listening to the admonition "it shall not be so among you" (Mk 10:43) at the last Chapter, we undertook to work for justice and peace as a Religious Family. In "a world wounded by selfishness and by thirst for power, marked by the scandal of poverty and lack of meaning, we wish to proclaim... the God of life".

GPIC is a commitment for everyone

But because "good intentions pave the way to hell", for this six-year term our first operative choice was, "We cultivate in ourselves a *change of mentality* which makes us aware of the problems of justice, of peace, and of the safeguarding of creation. We are ready to *engage ourselves* in our immediate environment and to let ourselves be involved in *collaboration* with those organisations which work in these fields" (Acts of the second General Chapter).

We said to ourselves so many times when we were preparing for the Chapter, "How shall we tell our brothers and sisters that you are the God of life?" And so that this proclamation urged on by compassion might become a reality, the operative choice shows us a practical way: we begin with *becoming aware*, we go on to a *change of mentality* to become *sensitized*, we involve our *will* by "an earnest and most determined resolve"⁷ - and we "*collaborate*"!

The ways and means to implement our commitment in daily life are at our hand:

- to form ourselves and others in the biblical and theological understanding of justice, of peace, and of the integrity of



The MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Safeguard environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

<http://www.undp.org/mdg/>

creation;

- to seek out further information about things on which we need to be up-to-date; we analyse the world situation, not stopping at the facts alone, but seeking out the causes of injustice and recognising the social implications of the faith, "passing the word"!
- to be "alert" to small and great opportunities to practise justice and peace, promoting a culture of peace and non-violence in our own community environment and in the wider social community. This gives free rein to charity and "taking care of", it is a going out of self and becoming aware of others, of the needy, of those who suffer physical and mental violence; it is to take responsibility for them and their sufferings;
- prayer is a constitutive aspect of work for peace; to pray for and celebrate the signs of peace, to be intercessors for people and for all that happens, with the intention of opening ourselves to others and of being sensitive to the cry of the exploited and im-

poverished;

- to unite ourselves with the global movement of "remembrance", incorporating into our liturgy the international days in which people who suffer situations of injustice are remembered and prayed for;
- courageously to review our lifestyle, our standard of living, and our economic options at a personal, community and congregational level;
- to know ourselves called to bear witness to quality relationships, with God, with other people and with all creation, and to a fraternity which is born principally in the community;
- to contribute, as far as is really possible, to planning and putting into effect "new forms of evangelisation" for present-day situations⁸, especially by sharing in inter-congregational initiatives and cooperating with social organisations;
- personal and community study centred on today's issues, like the Social Teaching of the Church, Human Rights, deeper understanding of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals, in which people of

many institutions and organisations can be found working in active co-operation - ourselves included.

One could go on... because charity's possibilities are boundless. I end with a poem written by Mons. Casaldàliga, which reminds us that our "now" is late, it really is late; but we are still in time, because we can decide that, for us, the day is just breaking.

"It is late
but it is our hour.
It is late
but it is all the time
that we have in hand
to build the future.
It is late
but it is we
who made it late.
It is late;
but we can tell ourselves
that the day is just beginning".

Sr. M. Juana Estela Segura

1. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*
2. *Justice in the World: Introduction*, 6
3. M. Vidal, *Seducidos por Jesús y solicitados por el mundo*
4. *Instruction Christ*, 35
5. *Lumen Gentium* 46
6. Jacques Diouf at the World Summit on Food Security (Nov. 2009)
7. St Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, 21
8. *Vita Consecrata*, 73

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