

# Justice, Peace And Integrity Of Creation In The Order Today

---

## *International Congress of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*

*Peter Schorr OFM  
Definitor General  
Director JPIC Office  
Rome*

### **Preamble**

We continually take it for granted that “justice, peace and the integrity of creation” are integral parts of our Franciscan vocation. With this we wish to say that we, the friars minor, sons of St. Francis of Assisi, live a special way of relating among ourselves, but also of relating to God and to nature, a relationship that we can appropriately describe as “fraternal.”

Our mission to evangelize or to announce with body and soul, with works and words the Good News, obliges us to recognize and assume our responsibility for something more than Justice in this world, to commit ourselves so that peace reigns among us and among all men and never to lose sight of our task of giving protective treatment to nature that appears to be already mortally wounded. Starting from these principles we must ask ourselves for the spiritual founda-

tions and the meaning of our commitment to the question of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, in the sense of them being fundamental principles of action. That which we live should not be uncertain theories, but rather a praxis to be taken very seriously and over which we wish to reflect in this International Congress in a systematic way; and this precisely we will do here in Vossenack, which seems to be a place predestined for this event. A place of Peace and Reconciliation immediately after the fright of war; a place to teach and learn peace; a place where living integration with Creation is attempted. I am so delighted that our Office in Rome took the decision to plan and now carry out this Congress with the hope that this dimension will give us a new impetus to turn to the world from our own spirituality.

### **Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in connection with our spirituality**

The correct and simple dealings of St. Francis with the human being and nature and the fact of linking both relationships in the hands of our Creator, an example of which is found in the Canticle to Brother Sun, motivated the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II to name him the Patron of Ecology. Undoubtedly this has great sense and it is good that it should have been so. It is an honor for the person himself and calls for imitation. But this is not enough to understand the whole spectrum of the dimen-

sion of Justice, Peace and Preservation and/or Integrity of Creation.

Francis, it is true, was a man of Peace and a man with good, unbreakable relations with Creation. Naturally, his understanding of nature was based on a theology of Creation in which God, the Creator of all life, called to life and put the world in motion through a creative act of his will. This vision corresponds to a rational logic of the actuality of seeing and understanding oneself as a creature, which as such enters into a fraternal relationship with other created beings. This understanding has its reason to be, but today it must be complemented with the dimension of concrete and contextual zed action, which not infrequently carries with it the taking of a public stance with political type consequences.

Our General Constitutions give justification to this perspective. It is true that the General Constitutions do not dedicate any particular chapter to dealing with Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in the way it does with our evangelizing task or with Initial and On-going Formation. Despite that, there can be found many parts where concrete action in the question of Justice, Peace and responsibility for and in the face of Creation are spoken of; these quotations can be read in our Orientation Manual "Instruments of Peace". The fact that no particular chapter exists does not de-value or make relative the significance of this dimension of our spirituality. It is precisely the opposite: the fact that in many places of the Gener-

al Con-stitutions admonitions to act in and from this dimension are found, is proof that it is an integral part of our Franciscan spirituality. Even more, that it is something specific to it, since we recognize in it, in a profound way, Franciscan action. I would like to express it provocatively instead of expressing it in the manner of a postulation. If Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation are an integral part of our spirituality do we really need our own office in Rome to animate this dimension or the work of the coordinators in the Provinces? Would it not be sufficient, perhaps, for us to animate each other in this dimension in order to make it concrete in our everyday labors?

I would understand this dimension that is so valuable in our lives in the sense that it is the fruit of an incarnate spirituality, although here I am only trying to mention it without having the time to go into the reasons. It is on taking a look at our General Constitutions that we find that "in charity towards all mankind, we are bound to announce the Gospel throughout the whole world and preach reconciliation, peace and justice by our deeds" (GGCC 1, 2). Precisely in the first article we find a series of lines of action that make reference to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The friars must make efforts to be in solidarity with the poor (GGCC 8, 2). They "ought to rejoice when they live among people [who are considered to be] of little worth and who are looked down upon, among the poor and the powerless, the sick and the lepers, and the beggars by the way-

side” (GGCC 8, 3). They “are to preserve purity of heart, and are to endeavor to regard all creatures with humility and devotion, conscious that they have been created for the glory of God” (GGCC 9, 4). “The friars are to seek to serve the least of humanity in penance, recognizing in them the Son of God” (32, 3). They “are to receive everyone with kindness and be well disposed to friend and foe alike, whether they come to us, or we go to them” (52). As pilgrims and strangers the friars should, in fidelity to their vocation to be friars minor, try to be cheerful and rejoice “as the servants and subjects of all, peaceful and humble of heart” (64). “The friars are to live in this world as promoters of justice and as messengers and agents of peace, overcoming evil and doing good. The friars shall proclaim peace by word, and cherish it so deep in their hearts that no one is stirred to anger or scandal, but rather that through them everyone is called back to peace, meekness and kindness” (68, 1-2). We should not be surprised that for Francis, in the poor and maltreated creation, the suffering and tortured human being is changed into a Sacrament, that is, into an eloquent and visible sign of the presence of the Crucified Lord.

This short but representative example from our General Constitutions show how the operative dimension “Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation” belongs essentially to our existence and permeates all the vital dimensions of our co-existence, both internal and external.

### **The Difficulties We Meet**

Despite all the above, I always find that this operative dimension of our spirituality generates great fear in many friars. This fear takes on a series of faces and are, in part, our own fears. At least I think I can express it in this way since I took on the task of being Director of our Office in Rome. I would like to name and describe those fears as follows.

It is the fear to allow oneself to be known publicly. As has been said, we are facing an operative dimension of our spirituality, that is, that gives the concrete motives for our acting. This dimension does not simply demand behavior but is an act and a provocation in action. When I organize a demonstration on the part of Justice against a Bank of great influence in order to call attention to and protest against the fact that the money deposited is invested in arms, which in turn causes destruction in the third world, then the demonstration acquires at the same time a political dimension. It is like saying: “Eh, you who are up there, I don’t agree with you investing in arms production since it indirectly destroys human lives”. This public recognition generates a series of reactions, including that of state finances. It can happen that one can be brought before the courts accused of disturbing public order on the local and national level. It has happened that Friars who have become committed to the rights of the exploited, for example, with the Land-less people of Brazil or the displaced in Colombia, have been threatened with death. We are dealing not only

with fear of the political dimension of our actions but also fear of losing one's very existence.

The fact of not being properly informed, or not to know what the work for Justice and the objectives of our behavior really involve also awakens fears. I am continually hearing the question: what does the Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in Rome really do? Not to be duly informed generates insecurity, which in turn, provokes fear. This has not been nor does the Office cause it; we do not want to be and are not some kind of secret faction. This is the fault of those who have complained or complain of not being informed. They, rather, have not wanted themselves to be informed, be it through those responsible in the Provinces or through the publication "Pax et Bonum" in which can be read in detail the how and for whom our Office has committed itself, or also through other means, such as information leaflets of those responsible in the Provinces.

Apart from that, every two years a meeting is held of the International Council, which informs the General Definitory of the path followed in the work. He who wants it can be well informed. But he who does not want to be informed will try to use his culpable ignorance to intrigue against the Commission for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. Let this friar understand that he is working unjustly against all those who are trying to transmit this Dimension into life without demanding anything personal.

There is a third face to this fear of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation that is based more on the activity of the very friars committed to the work: it is the toughness and the merciless way they act and the fears they provoke in the other friars. It must be recognized that on this point there is a certain internal culpability through which the work for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation loses credibility. When radical we are often impatient with our brothers and others who surround us, as if to implement our objectives of our work as soon as possible was best. There is even aggression against those who make little or no commitment and it is thought that through a life in the midst of the poor they are unmasked or overcome. It is possible that this provokes jealousies and envy in the non-committed friars. In these aspects we can see the internal challenges to our work that we must face and overcome through our own efforts. We can gain a lot of credibility when we make an effort to have justice within ourselves and defend peace: "Freed of all fear because by the poverty they have chosen and joyfully living in the hope that is based on the promise, while also promoting mutual acceptance and benevolence among men and women, the friars are to be instruments of the reconciliation that has been brought about by the cross of Jesus Christ" (GGCC 70).

This means, without any doubt, that the foundation of our service to each other and to others in all that refers to Justice and Peace can only be the reconciliation

that Christ Himself achieved. From the very disposition to live for reconciliation and to continue assuming in a renewed way the everyday life looking to Him, who did not flee from humiliation and pain, we will obtain the help to allow us to let peace reign in our midst and implement justice. It is only in this way that we can give our service and give our contribution and also eradicate the fears that function in our brothers and convince them that the outlining of our spirituality towards the seeking of Justice and Peace is not something special or something honorable but rather is a constitutive element of our fraternal life and action.

### **The General Chapter of 1997**

I think you well know the conclusions of the General Chapter of 1997 where it is said that the Office for Justice should be submitted to a revision on the role and meaning of the service to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in order to re-define it (cf. "Other Decisions", No. 6).

This was entrusted to the new directing team of the Order. It took time for me to be able to take on, in a proper way, the work of my predecessor John Quigley –and, if you wish, this would be the first revision – and to begin the work. It was not easy, I'm sure, for those who knew and valued the work of John in Justice and Peace to accept that there was a successor, even when he himself was disposed to continue with it. And the new successor was part of the new General Definitory that undertook, as one of the

first signs of its method of working, a change or re-location of personnel. Without the help of Francisco O'Conaire, who I asked to accompany me and to be at my side in this new task that I was taking on, I would not have succeeded in going forward. I even assume that the sword of Damocles of the new definition is hanging over me! What has to be re-formulated in the General Constitutions that was not clearly understandable in it? How can we imagine a new definition of the work in the Office if it is that this work must also fit in to a new definition? Such a task could give the impression that the General Definitory and the director of the Office were not in agreement with the work done up to now. Worse still by asking the question: perhaps it was not known how the office should be? The attempt there was during the Chapter to transform the Office into a Secretariat was, from the beginning, condemned to failure. This proposal drew only a minority of sympathizers. Could it, perhaps, be different?

If I have understood correctly, the work in favor of Justice and Peace should, in the first place, begin with us. How and where are we in respect to that concerning Justice and Peace within our communities, our Provinces, in the Order in general? We were dealing, and are dealing, with an effective "ad intra" animation, the starting point of which is the fraternity gathered in the Lord that forms one heart and one soul just like the Acts of the Apostles describes the first communities (Acts 2, 43-47). It is certain that subtle

forms of unconformity and injustice exist in our communities. It is necessary to call attention to them for reasons of our own credibility. I cannot demand anything of others outside beyond that which I myself am not willing to live within. But it can also easily happen that I get lost in the purely internal that turns me in on myself until I'm dizzy and unable to find a way out. We are not dealing with, for example, demanding the change of article 3 of our General Constitutions if in the reality of everyday life the living of equality between priests and lay is not wanted. To the ad intra and ad extra animation is added: acceptance of responsibility for a peaceful and just world; commitment to those who are marginalized in society, to those who have no voice in the courts or before the powerful of this world and from whom rights and dignity have been taken and then abandoned in their nakedness and done in such a way as to offer them a voice through us. Also belonging to this task is the question of our treatment of nature linked together with the question of commitment to the strict fulfillment of human rights.

The last International Council of 1997 tried to reflect duly on this dealing with nature and spoke of Justice for the environment. The destruction of our vital space has to be seen in direct relationship to the possible violations of human rights. When this intimate connection is duly shown it must be pointed out – and here I wish to make it in a critical way – that the preservation of creation has its own right along the lines of “Justice for

the environment,” “integrity,” “continued development.” For me this is a value in itself and unfortunately within the work of the Office, the value put on the Integrity of Creation is small. The question of the contamination of the environment, the preservation of creation is not taken up in reflection in our Fraternities or at least is not dealt with the proper attention.

Each one of us must become aware that technology and economics do not guarantee any more the unlimited possibilities for the human construction of the world, nor do they guarantee the broad participation of society in its well being. When the human person knows he is immersed in nature the necessary point of contact to understand his dependence on nature is given. If the present globalization of the economy tries to suggest the opposite it is because its model of technological-instrumental development has another concept of nature as its basis, incites man to take possession of it and to use it for his own ends and going beyond the frontiers of economics. This model should not continue indefinitely. The resources of our mother earth and its useable energy are coming to an end. Questions like when will they be used up? Or who will be affected? No longer play an outstanding role. The de-stabilization of the ecological systems recognizes no boundaries of time or country. The environmental catastrophes have global consequences and are not held back on the frontiers of any state. And because this is so, the commitment to the protection of the envi-

ronment must be changed into a global action that equally crosses the frontiers of states, a global action in which the diverse groups committed to this cause, e.g. the Friars Minor, should coordinate in a common effort. Where are we carrying this out in a concrete way?

Creation is more than that understood as nature, it is the space of given life, even when the experience of finitude, mortality, guilt and need for redemption is also part of it. In this vital space it is worthwhile making a balanced distinction between the transcendence and the imminence. The human being achieves it when he recognizes and assumes his responsibility for himself and for his social and natural environment. In this sense it is possible to use the term “Justice for the environment” validly just as the International Council of 1997 used it. This term is much more descriptive than that which expresses the link between poverty, migratory movement and deterioration of the environment. In it there is also expressed how there should be required for nature, for its own value, the same right that is required in an evident form for the human being itself. The question of the responsible treatment of Creation that has been entrusted to us will play, by itself, a very important role in the future with the treatment of the topic of the breaking down of human rights. I believe that we should learn to see our mission according to this new perspective. This belongs also, in my opinion, to the new definition of our future work. Since the first meetings of the General Definitory

the Office has been asked to make other adjustments: it was in respect to the three monthly magazine “Pax et Bonum”. All those who wished to be informed about the work that was done to then from our Office could do so by means of this publication that was conscientiously elaborated and had an admirable technical presentation. This magazine was the personal work of John Quigley who has a great ability and sense of commitment in the area of publications and work towards others. I must admit that I would not have been able to continue with this publication. John could have continued. But he hadn’t got to and I couldn’t. And indeed Francisco either. Therefore, from an organ of publicity that went out from the Office it became an organ of the curia that has the same name but the assignment of which is to inform about the different activities of all the Secretariats and offices of our General Curia in Rome. Sure, even this does not console us much if what was sacrificed is taken into account. In this context I have had the impression that the new definition of the work should be in reality a reduction to a minimum of commitments. It is clear that we have squeezed our tasks enough, which has created a strong impression in some. But, could this not be a means to achieving good work? Good work also has its price. I believe, with full conviction, that John really did great work during the time that he directed the Office in Rome. Without him and the amount of time he dedicated to the Office it would not be what it is today, even if some don’t wish to recognize it thus.

### **Why/For What Purpose A Congress?**

This question is justifiable; the high costs and all the work could have been avoided really. I made the suggestion to have this Congress because of the continual discussions and questioning on the justification of the work to which both the Office in Rome and the friars committed to this work on a world level have been submitted. The Secretariat for Formation and Studies organized during recent years a series of Congresses in order to indicate the need for a good initial and on-going formation and for a solid preparation. This is equally valid for the operative dimension of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. I want to break down the fears, lay a foundation for altruistic commitments and sharpen the conscientization in view of this dimension. In a few words, that this Congress might serve animation, deep study, clarification, encouragement and projection. Justice and Peace is a question concerning all of us and all those who sympathize with our spirituality and would like to share it with us. We must learn to contribute from ourselves and with those who seek this deep understanding and who strive to achieve a sustainable development in the area of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, in economics and in all the social systems

in which we live. To give a contribution from our basis in Franciscan spirituality, from faith in God, whose creation is for us, in order that both we ourselves and all human beings understand that development must have its deep roots and principles of action in the values such as the person, the common good, solidarity and subsidiarity, which in turn should be intimately linked with the whole ecological system that lies at their base. We must always be conscious and constant in the conviction that – whether ad intra or ad extra – we are dealing with human dignity and that I myself, who was called to be and to be-as-I-am, am called and enabled to assume responsibility for my fellow men. In order to seek to give in the best way possible this contribution is the reason for which this Congress was convoked. It is in function of that we have all the effort and costs.

When I see the Agenda for these days I believe that we have good content and we have found a method to achieve the most of our objectives, that is, to be instruments of peace, directed by the Spirit, who is none other than the Spirit of Jesus and of our founding Father, Francis. It is the spirit of fraternity, the spirit of good fellowship.