



FOOD CRISIS AND THE GREEN ECONOMY – SAFEGUARDING CREATION

INTRODUCTION

Recent world events, which we interpret as signs of the times, sensitize and challenge today's Franciscans, leading us to see that it is time to revisit our personal lifestyles, in terms of living our Franciscan spirituality. One of the most important themes in the Franciscan life is respect for ecology, so the question arises: Are we experiencing the same feelings and attitudes of Francis regarding the safeguarding of creation? With this presentation we want to open the door so that together we are able to bring a greater commitment to environmental attitudes and actions that can make a difference in our environments. Safeguarding creation does not just mean to reverence and admire nature itself, but it also means honoring and living the universal community, where the fully realized human being can, along with all creation, adhere to the presence of Christ Himself, by whom all things were created, from who all things come to be, and to whom everything returns.



1. THE FOOD CRISIS

According to the article “Hunger in the Face of Crisis” published by the FAO:



The latest hunger figures are particularly unsettling as undernourishment is not a result of limited international food supplies. Recent figures of the FAO Food Outlook indicate a strong world cereal production in 2009, which will only modestly fall short of last year's record output level. Clearly, the world can produce enough food to eliminate hunger. However, food supplies are very unevenly distributed across the globe. While wealthy countries produce large surpluses, many developing countries do not have enough food to guarantee their citizens a level of consumption required for a healthy life.

Another issue concerns the use of food. In fact, only half of the world's cereal production is currently used directly for human consumption. Agricultural production increasingly goes into animal feed in order to satisfy growing meat consumption, especially in emerging economies. Or it serves non-food uses, such as the production of biofuels to help quench the world's steadily growing energy needs.



Undernourishment affects large segments of the population in developing countries. It particularly hurts the rural landless as they cannot rely on self subsistence farming and the urban poor.¹

2. THE GREEN ECONOMY

The green economy concept has given much to talk about, although the proponents (such as the EU, U.S. and UN agencies) state that it is still under construction. The United Nations Program for Environment (UNEP) defines it as an economy that:

...results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. In its simplest expression, a green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive.²



According to the business sector, green economy is defined as "a set of modes of production which seeks to maximize production, taking into account variables that have been ignored until recently when setting up a business, such as conservation of natural resources and the eradication of poverty."³

Environmental groups question this, and affirm that:



[This] new concept of 'green economy'... basically means... [to increase] the basis of exploitation and privatization of nature ... For example, it is true that, as another option, it promotes organic agriculture, which is better than chemistry, no doubt, but under the assumption that to do this 'massively' would require large areas or even 'organic' monocultures certified and controlled by transnational corporations that can supply large retail chains and centralized markets. Paradoxically, this will make food sovereignty much more unsafe. By relying on transnationals, today they may produce organic produce, but

tomorrow as always, they will produce that which gives them more money, either organic or chemical, or transgenic. Now, without local options, without sovereignty in the seeds, without peasants to defend their rights at each location, their monopoly is assured.⁴



Indicators of the damage that the Green Economy is responsible for

Part of its implementation is open pit mining which is promoted in most poor countries, and which affects the lives of indigenous peoples; oil extraction, large dams that become threats to life on planet Earth. Energy is being promoted through the "biomass", or the conversion of plants, algae and organic waste into a source of energy to replace oil as agro fuels. This would mean that millions of acres

¹ FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATION, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT, *Hunger in the Face of Crisis*, September 2009, Internet (23.04.2013): http://www.fao.org/economic/es-policybriefs/briefs-detail/en/c/35540/?no_cache=1

² UNEP, 2011. *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication - A Synthesis for Policy Makers*, www.unep.org/greeneconomy/, 2, Internet (26.04.2013): http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/Portals/88/documents/ger/GER_synthesis_en.pdf

³ CAMPOS M., *Economía verde*, in *Éxito empresarial*, Consultora Ambiente y Desarrollo, CEGESTI, 151 (2010), p.2, Internet (23.04.2013): http://www.cegesti.org/exitoempresarial/publicaciones/publicacion_151_060611_es.pdf

⁴ SILVIA R., *Economía verde o economía fúnebre*, Grupo ETC, in *Revista soberanía alimentaria, biodiversidad y culturas*, Internet (23.04.2013): <http://revistasoberaniaalimentaria.wordpress.com/2012/04/10/economia-verde-o-economia-funebre/>



that should be covered by forests or producing food would be dedicated to feeding machines. Also climate-smart agriculture, imposing the use of GMOs "adapted" to drought, and of new agro toxics. This means that native populations lose control over their territories, ecosystems, and water to produce food, putting the population at risk.

Given the above, the *Declaration of Indigenous People* in the Closing Session of the Roundtable of negotiations of the Cero draft during the United Nations Rio-20 affirms:

The proposed "green economy" causes many concerns. We do not accept that it be used by corporations and states to continue replicating the destructive and exploitative model of "economic development" that has caused the current crisis. [...] Guiding Sustainable Development with culture ... must be the fourth pillar of sustainable development. [...] From this pillar traditional knowledge can contribute to truly sustainable development. From thence we should ensure the respect, protection, the promotion of traditional knowledge, and the sustainable livelihoods of indigenous peoples. [...] For us it is vital to consider the rights of Mother Earth, because it is our source of life, spirituality, wisdom and knowledge. She holds the life and harmony that we have as beings, so it is our duty to protect her.⁵



What then is the true root of this problem and how can we find a solution?

The Social Doctrine of the Church offers us principles and performance criteria that can guide us through the growing threat to the life of the planet.



Solutions to the ecological problem require that economic activity respect the environment to a greater degree, reconciling the needs of economic development with those of environmental protection. Every economic activity making use of natural resources must also be concerned with safeguarding the environment and should foresee the costs involved, which are "an essential element of the actual cost of economic activity". In this context, one considers relations between human activity and climate change which, given their extreme complexity, must be opportunely and constantly monitored at the scientific, political and juridical, national and international levels. The climate is a good that must be protected and reminds consumers and those engaged in industrial activity to develop a greater sense of responsibility for their behaviour⁶.

Remember that God's plan at the beginning of creation was that humans live in harmony with each other (cf. Genesis 2:18-25). The root of this problem is that humanity (of all persuasions, ethnicities, social classes and cultures) is endangered by excessive ambition, and the fundamentalist ideologies that we face each other. For this reason the safeguarding of creation involves the responsibility and commitment that we all have, in the care and development of all that has been created, including man himself, without distinction. In this situation, Francis challenges us saying: "For we have been called to this: to heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring" (L3C 58).

⁵Pueblos indígenas preocupados por le economía verde en negociaciones hacia Rio+20, in *Red Internacional de Estudios Interculturales*, (08.05.2012), Internet (23.04.2013): <http://blog.pucp.edu.pe/item/158370/mundo-pueblos-indigenas-preocupados-por-la-economia-verde-en-negociaciones-hacia-rio-20?>

⁶ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, 470, Internet (23.04.13): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

New options to the food crisis and the harmful effects of the so called Green economy

The orientation proposed for many years by “Vida Campesina”, the organization of indigenous movements, constitutes a response to the crisis:



To ensure the independence and food sovereignty for all peoples of the world, it is essential that food be produced under diversified production systems, in a rural base. Food sovereignty is the right of all peoples to define their own agricultural policies, in terms of food, to protect and regulate domestic agricultural production and the domestic market in order to achieve sustainable goals, decide how much autonomy to have, without getting rid of their surpluses in third countries dumping practices (unfair practice in international trade is a product to be introduced into the commerce of another country at less than its value in the country of origin). International trade should not take priority over the social, environmental, cultural or developmental criteria⁷.

An example of ecological practices that guarantees the protection of creation⁸

Twenty-five years ago, the landscape of the *Mixteca Alta*, the "land of the sun", in Oaxaca, Mexico, resembled a lunar landscape: arid and dusty fields devoid of trees, without water and fruit. People had to travel long distances in search of water and firewood. Almost all young people migrated to never return, fleeing the difficult conditions of life. In the 1980s, a group of Guatemalan refugees arrived in Oaxaca when social and political conditions in their country became unstable. For ten years, Guatemalans had developed an agricultural system of production based on organic principles and indigenous knowledge. People who had participated in these programs came from Guatemala during the crisis and settled in our region, starting to train people with their techniques. Jesus Leon, 42, a Mexican Indian peasant, was one of those who received such training.



How was the Project worked out?

They decided to revive an indigenous tool that had been forgotten: *tequio*, which is an organized form of collective work from which the community members must profit by providing their labor toward a community enterprise. Thus, with the help of 400 families with their small contributions, like little grains of sand, economically speaking, an unprecedented reforestation program was achieved.



With picks and shovels they dug trenches and ditches to retain scarce water from rainfall, planted trees in small nurseries, collected compost and planted barriers to prevent the escape of fertile land in the great battle against erosion.

Today, the Mixteca became green again, with more water springs, with trees and food in abundance and its people do not migrate. Their efforts have been rewarded with the greening of barren hills, and refilled aquifers. Also the rate of emigration decreased when people realized that they can make a living at home, because, as they say: "A farmer is the one who can best understand the needs and

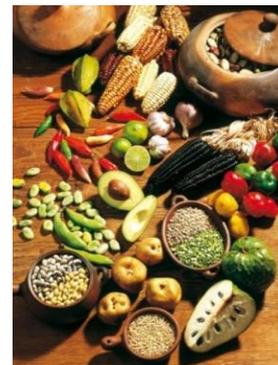


⁷ DIAZ-SALAZAR R., *Vía Campesina, Justicia Global. Las alternativas de los movimientos del Foro de Porto Alegre*, Icaria editorial and Intermón Oxfam, 2002, 87. 90.

⁸ Cf. "Nobel de Ecología" por reverdecer la desértica Mixteca, in *Ecogaia, La Revista del Desarrollo Sostenible*, 28.03.2011, Internet (26.04.2013): <http://www.ecogaia.com/nobel-de-ecologia-por-reverdecer-la-desertica-mixteca.html>.

possibilities of another peasant". The use of wood-saving stoves eased the work of women, since they no longer travel long distances to get firewood.

They managed to develop a system of sustainable and organic agriculture through the recovery and conservation of native seeds of corn, without use of pesticides. It seems to be a variety of corn native to the area, *maizcajete*, which is the most resistant to drought. It was not easy to convince people, they say, because it is difficult to stop using fertilizer in one fell swoop. It has to be done slowly, reducing chemical fertilizers, and increasing green manure, in order to not drastically affect production. People live from their land; if we force them to change dramatically from one system to another; they can suffer severe reduction in their production and thus become unmotivated. The change must be gradual.



Results

This led to the creation of a movement and the Center for Integral Campesino Development of the Mixteca, (CEDICAM) was founded. Thus they have achieved their independence, sovereignty, and food security, through the farming system called "*milpa system*" which combines different crops in the same field. This system does not produce eight tons per hectare of a monoculture, which requires a large investment of chemicals and machinery, but it gives the farmer 1,800 kilos of maize for their families and animals. It also provides beans, pumpkins, edible greens, herbs or anything else they have planted in their plots, all this without a huge investment and using green manure and only native seeds. In addition they always have a surplus to sell.



They have planted over one million trees and more than a thousand hectares were reforested. Their sustainable agriculture programs have led to the conservation of some two thousand acres. They have achieved the protection of five thousand acres with terraces and stone walls, thus increasing by 50% their agricultural production with greater retention of water and topsoil. Before this, only between 25 to 30% of the land was arable, now it is more than 80 percent. Contour ditches that retain storm water have raised by 50 to 100% the levels of the

springs. All this has greatly improved life in communities across the region and, consequently, reduced emigration.

Due to the success achieved in 2009 they were awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize which is given each year to grassroots environmental heroes. This project has aroused so much interest that, through CEDICAM, their experiences with water conservation techniques, measures against erosion, and the practice of sustainable agriculture are being shared in forums held throughout Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean, as well as at several universities and events in the United States. They understand that because of climate change, erosion, flooding and desertification severely affect farmers and, consequently, food security. Before this, many farmers were abandoning their lands. For this reason the promotion of this project seeks to implement it in other indigenous communities.



What difference did this successful Project make?

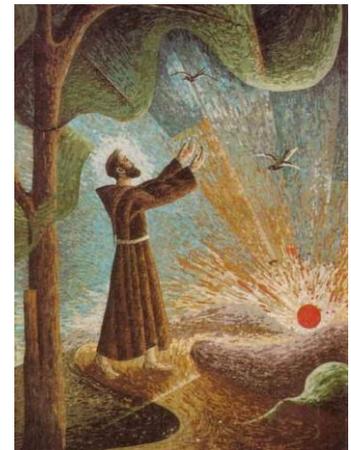
1) They did not have a profit motive or exploitation, but rather aimed toward the common good. For this reason, solidarity and the 'grain of sand' from each person allowed for the sustainable development of the community.

- 2) They showed no individualism, private ownership, right of authorship or undercutting of local experiences. This allowed them to "learn by doing" through actual practice, appropriating a working methodology that strengthened their abilities, skills, and knowledge of community development.
- 3) Aware of their ancestral wealth, Mayas and Mixtecs combined their knowledge, assessing and recovering their ancestral farming methods and the food biodiversity of the area, which allowed them to not only ensure food security and improve nutrition, but, also, to identify and build new knowledge generated by the process of solving a problem.

3. SAFEGUARDING OF CREATION

From the Conference of the Franciscan Family on the occasion of Pentecost 2005 we sent the letter "Instruments of Peace"⁹, from which we extracted the following texts:

With their hands free to embrace and serve the lepers (cf. *Test* 1-3), it was not necessary for Francis and his Brothers to procure any instruments of defense or arms to defend what they possessed from others (cf. *3Comp* 35). Free of all pretensions and from every claim, the first Franciscan generation did not see a rival, an enemy, in the other. In a disarming way they recognized everyone as a brother or sister in Jesus Christ Through work (cf. *Rnb* 7,1-9), through wishing to insert themselves among the poor and excluded (cf. *Rnb* 9,2), through the rejection of money (*Rnb* 8,1-12) which was a new and brutal form of capitalism of that time, Francis and his Brothers gave prophetic witness to the possibility of a different way to co-exist and of a civil and ecclesial society enlightened by the Gospel of Jesus. (*Instruments of Peace* 3)



The difficult way of peace

After a “dark century” of fierce wars, brutal dictatorships, grave and unjust social disparity between north and south of the world and the cold war, the beginning of the new millennium was full of hope and even of enthusiasm for a more peaceful and more just time. But already the first years of this new century are showing us the fragility of the coexistence of humanity and new splits are being opened up which threaten world peace and the restructuring of a just equilibrium between nations. [...]The ruthless rules, finally, of a market which, in the name of freedom, subordinates the value of life to that of the economy, giving privilege to a few and marginalizing many, often condemning the weakest in particular to a future without hope: women, children, the old and sick. At times it seems that the seeds of peace are really suffocated by the interests of political and economic power, by the structures of injustice and personal sin. [...]In the Franciscan spirit, faced by all these situations, we cannot remain passive or merely moved to tears, we must feel that we are called to follow the footprints of Jesus Christ, who came “to bring the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favor” (Lk 4, 18). (*Instruments of Peace* 6)

Currently thousands of people die worldwide from the malpractice of transnational corporations, whose primary purpose is to obtain huge profits. As Franciscans we must reject all those activities that destroy our planet and only serve to generate wealth for the few, who with their immeasurable ambition threaten all mankind.

⁹ *Instruments of Peace*, Letter of the Conference of the Franciscan Family on the occasion of Pentecost 2005, Rome, 15.05.2005, Internet (26.04.2013): <http://www.ofm.org/o1docum/pen2005/pening.pdf>

How to promote the safeguarding of creation in the midst of a world in conflict?

During the OFS General Chapter held in November 2008, our remembered former General Minister, our sister Emanuela De Nunzio, deepening the sense of belonging to the Order, reminded us:

Motivated by the worrisome conditions of our planet, a new sensibility is developing toward ecological problems: based on the perspective provided by the Creator, the need to fight to deliver a truly habitable planet to future generations is imposed upon us. There arise new values, new dreams, new behaviors taken on by an ever larger number of persons and of communities. The basic principal is that of safeguarding creation. It is a principle that binds each and every one of us. It is evident that, with every planetary effort, each country and even each person, should contribute to the best of their ability. As Franciscans, besides strengthening our own personal commitment for a simple lifestyle (Rule. n. 11 and CC. GG. art. 15.3), we are also called to build, together with the many who work in the harvest of the Kingdom, a world globalized within which all can enter, where there is a respect of creation, love among all and just relationships that allow an honest life to all. And then, taking care of creation means pledging oneself in different fields of action, each one connected to the others: from the elimination of nuclear weapons to a change of lifestyle, from a regeneration of political/economic/military power to the adoption of nonviolence as a way of living the connectedness with things created and with all creatures¹⁰.

The challenge for us Franciscans is to develop this other way of relating with nature and among nations. You hear the call to "all men and women of good will, to contribute to building a more humane and just society." We must eradicate the social and environmental violence of capitalism and other systems of totalitarian regimes that are damaging the environment. For this we must restore production systems that are based on the common good and respect for creation. The ancestral knowledge, biodiversity and its sustainable use are topical issues and should be present in all designs of environmental policy and sustainable development. These are seen as natural and cultural heritage, but still not recognized as strong enough to be part of the engine of national economies, for lack of public policies that identify the production chain for products and services from the biodiversity of indigenous territories. We just need to be aware and commit to the groups already working on this.



4. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE IN THE FRATERNITIES

1. Do you know Franciscans who are involved in ecological movements? What is your opinion about their work?
2. Do you know about some ecological projects that would be worth your support or involvement?
3. How can you be involved more actively in the safeguarding of creation?

**“Start by doing what is necessary; then do what’s possible;
suddenly you will be doing the impossible”**

5. OTHER DOCUMENTS AND REFERENCES

- PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, Internet (23.04.13): http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html
- OFS Rule: http://www.francescanitor.org/resources/OFS/English/OFS_Rule.EN.pdf

¹⁰DE NUNZIO E., *Belonging to the OFS*, General Chapter, 15-22.11.2008, Internet (26.04.2013): <http://ciofs.org/doc/kia8/kia8en12.htm>