

Please send by e-mail no later than 28 February 2010

Commissio Constitutionum

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- ◆ Name of Circumscription:
- ◆ Brother/s:
- ◆ This evaluation refers to the **entire** “Proposed revision of Chapter IV”
- ◆ Evaluation: The entire proposed revision of Chapter IV lacks the central insight of PCOs VI & VII which is to move our understanding of Capuchin poverty and minority from a static ascetical virtue to a dynamic understanding that empowers the building and repairing of Gospel relationships, frees us from the sin that holds us back from what we want to do, and graphically builds the kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven.” This renewed and reformed Capuchin vision that flows out of our tradition cannot be articulated by changing or adding a few words here and there within the existing text. Instead it requires a different text that is equally faithful to our Capuchin tradition and expressive of the insights acquired from CPOs VI and VII.
- ◆ Proposed alternative text: We propose that a new consultation of all the members of the Order on chapter four be executed, but this time using the proposed text for Chapter IV as found in the Project 2006 as the starting point and not the proposed revision of Chapter 4 offered by the current Commission on the Constitutions.
- ◆ Reasons for this suggestion:
 - The world-wide Order is better served by considering a proposal for chapter 4 that expresses a dynamic, relationship-building approach to poverty and minority as reflected in Project 2006 than by considering the predominantly ascetical approach continued in the proposal from the current commission and recently circulated to the Order. This difference is the central point of PCOs VI and VII, and to not honor it above all in the revision of our Constitutions is to miss the point. Chapter 4 of the Project 2006 much more faithfully expresses this change in orientation indicated by PCOs VI and VII, and is, therefore, a better proposal to begin the world-wide consideration of the Order.
 - PCO VI 3 states that “Without minority, our poverty would have no meaning and would become a source of pride, just as without material poverty, interior poverty would be unreal. “ PCO VII 4 states that poverty and minority are “constitutive elements of following Christ” and “bring Franciscan freedom.” Finally, in their letter presenting the conclusions of PCO VII to the Order, the last General Definitory led by Minster John Corriveau wrote, “... we would like to remind you that PCO VII should be seen as completing the Sixth, because without minority and itinerancy, poverty lived in brotherhood would have little social impact. Its spirit would be missing.” These statements do not seem adequately reflected in the current commission’s proposal for chapter 4, which minimizes the importance of PCOs VI and VII.

- The mandate of the current and past commissions working on updating our Constitutions and complementary code has been to include the learnings from recent PCOs. The most important PCOs to consider during the current revision are CPOs V, VI, and VII since they occurred after the composition of the current Constitutions. To characterize the proposal for Chapter 4 in the Project 2006 as “radical” (see “Introduction” to the current proposal for Chapter 4) is not a helpful characterization of Project 2006 for several reasons. First, the traditional subject of chapter four is our life in poverty. Since PCO VI considered our poverty and PCO VII considered our minority which has an “unbreakable connection” to poverty (PCO VI 3; and note 8 about proposed Const 64,5), it stands to reason that those PCOs should offer a much greater abundance of changes to chapter 4 of our Constitutions. Second, this is not unprecedented in the recent history of our Constitutions. The current Constitutions reflect a similar abundance of changes on formation which are reflected in chapter 2 of the current Constitutions that came from PCO IV on formation, and changes on our missionary life reflected in chapter 12 on fostering and spreading the faith which came from PCO III on our missionary life. For the “Introduction” of the current proposal for chapter 4 to characterize Project 2006’s proposal as “radical” in a negative way conceals the history of the immense impact past PCOs have had on our current Constitutions. Third, it deflects the mandate of the current commission on our Constitutions to include the learnings of the PCOs into its proposals. Instead, the proposal given to the world-wide Order should be “radical” in the positive sense, i.e., a return to the original roots, but in a way that responds to the legitimate signs of the current times uncovered by recent PCOs.
- The proposal for chapter 4 from Project 2006 displays a vibrant language that fills the ears, eyes, heart and mind with sound, images, feelings and thoughts that deepen the religious values being discussed. Its text manifests a wonderful linguistic unity, consistency, and beauty. This superior type of literature that so effectively motivates the reader ought to be the genre of chapter 4.
- The more dynamic treatment of poverty/minority in chapter 4 of Project 2006 offers the friars and our world more palpable *hope* because it places our Franciscan witness in the context of salvation history over time and in various places. It is more difficult to find this evangelical hope in the more static and ascetical presentation of chapter 4 by the current commission’s proposal.
- The more static presentation of poverty in the current commission’s proposed chapter 4 can appear condescending to people in poverty. On the other hand, the more dynamic presentation in chapter 4 of Project 2006 describes people in poverty and the friars as a single community of sisters and brothers who are freed by the Gospel mandate together. The Project’s approach is more desirable for the modern age.
- The conclusion that minority “transverses” (Prudente Nery’s assessment that is accepted by the current commission wholesale without critique; see footnote 11 and lengthy quotes and references in the “Introduction” of the current commission) all other Franciscan values, thus making the inclusion of minority in the title and content of chapter 4 undesirable is not a logical necessity. One only has to consider that “fraternity” is a word our Order attaches to almost every Capuchin and Franciscan Value (e.g., fraternal poverty, fraternal economy, fraternal charity, fraternal obedience, etc.). Yet, we have a chapter (six) totally devoted to fraternity. Penance (chapter seven) is a similar reality. Our Father Francis considered his entire life as a life of penance. Using the same logic as the current commission, one could then conclude that

separate chapters on fraternity or penance are not warranted because they should influence the content of *every* chapter. A different logic serves us better. When an important value (PCO VII 4 calls it a “constitutive element”) is discovered to have been neglected, it behooves us to give it more explicit attention. When that addition gives the traditional concept (poverty) a more complete meaning, it should be utilized. In this case, the proposal of Project 2006 was not to give *minority* its own chapter, but to link it with poverty because their meanings are so intertwined and because linking them helps to give both a more dynamic and less static meaning.

- Likewise, the current commission’s reasoning that *minority* should not be given a prominent place in chapter four because it is not a vow (see footnote 11) is also flawed. If this logic were applied consistently, our Constitutions might have a total of only three chapters! But even if some organizational chapters were allowed in addition to those on the vows, chapters on prayer (three), work (five), fraternity (six), and penance (seven) would also seem to lack any fundamental reason to be independent chapters. Again, a different logic serves us better. When an important value (PCO VII 4 calls it a “constitutive element”) is discovered to have been neglected, it behooves us to give it more explicit attention. When that addition gives the traditional concept (poverty) a more complete meaning, it should be utilized.
- Finally, the concerns expressed in this “Evaluation” cannot be addressed by simply changing or adding new words here and there. If that is done, as the current commission’s proposal does, the result fails to express the more dynamic understanding of our poverty and minority called for by PCOs VI and VII. Instead, they require a different kind of composition that was provided by Project 2006. Clearly, Chapter 4 of Project 2006 no more than the proposal of the current commission should be accepted without critique from all the friars in the Order. But it is a much more helpful starting point from which the friars of the world should begin. Hundreds of “Evaluations” would need to be submitted to achieve the desired difference in the current commission’s proposal. However, even after so many “Evaluations” the basic orientation of the static understanding could still prevail. Thus, we conclude it is much more desirable to simply start with a different proposal, one that happily is readily available and was the result of work by four different commissions over six years of study (Chapter 4 of Project 2006).