

THE THIRD PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR CAPUCHIN

Letter of the General Definitory to all the Friars of our Order.

Dear Brothers,

With this letter we present to you the final document of the Third Plenary Council, held at Mattli, Switzerland, from 29th August to 22nd September of this year.

Considering the detailed preparation made by means of the questionnaire, and the method of work adopted by the delegates representing the jurisdictions of the Order, we can say that this document collects and develops the constructive contributions of the whole fraternity, with the aim of bringing about an adequate updating of our missionary life and activity. (cf. Consts. 110, 5)

In accepting this final synthesis of the reflections of the Third Plenary Council of the Order, we are confident that we are offering you all a valuable means for the renewal of an important dimension of our evangelizing service according to the spirit of the Vatican Council, the needs of the times and our Franciscan vocation.

The theme of this Third Plenary Council was expressly proposed in the last General Chapter. The need to discuss it in depth was repeatedly emphasized by all. Therefore the meeting at Mattli, besides having the value of shared fraternity, ideas and information, was intended as a response to specific expectations of the Order, in the face of a series of questions and new situations which have arisen in our times in a vital area of evangelization.

In the light of present-day ecclesiology, of our identity as Capuchin Friars Minor, and of changed situations in the world, the response of the Plenary Council opens up for the Order a wide horizon of perspectives and solutions.

The response does not claim to be exhaustive or definitive, but only wishes to offer a stimulus and guidance for reflection, so that we might acquire the right attitudes in our missionary service today, with full understanding and courage.

Therefore, with the publication of this document, the practical phase of the Third Plenary Council of the Order now begins; each and every one of us must responsibly commit himself to study and put into practice what is proposed here, so that our missionary dimension might be renewed and updated.

And so, we earnestly request all our friars – in the first place the Superiors – to ensure a profound study of this document at all levels, so that, accepting the challenge of the “providential signs of the times,” we may be able to respond adequately to our commitment as evangelical men and preachers of the Gospel.

Yours devotedly in the Lord,

Br. Paschal Rywalski, Minister General
Br. Benedici Frei, Vicar General
Br. J. Carlos Correa Pedrosa, Definitor General
Br. Jacob Acharuparampil, Definitor General
Br. Francis Xavier Toppi, Definitor General
Br. Fidelis Lenaerts, Definitor General
Br. Francis Iglesias, Definitor General
Br Aloysius Ward, Definitor General
Br Theodosius Manucci, Definitor General

Rome, 4th October, 1978.

THIRD PLENARY COUNCIL OF THE ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR CAPUCHIN MISSIONARY LIFE AND ACTIVITY

Mattli, Switzerland: 29th August to 22nd September, 1978

INTRODUCTION

1. Assembled at Mattli for the Plenary Council of the Order, before all else we feel the need and duty to send our warm wishes to all of you, our missionary brothers, who are generously dedicated to bearing the burden and joy of our service of evangelization in every continent and in situations that are often difficult. We are well aware of your work, and with great affection we wish to express to you the gratitude of the whole Order. By your sacrifices and availability you are an eloquent symbol, both of our Capuchin presence and as true preachers of hope in the midst of the people you serve.

Your history, before which we stand in thoughtful admiration, makes us humble in our search, courageous in our reflections and confident about our future. We address this summary of our reflections in the form of a fraternal message to the whole Order, which by a special charism is involved in the Church's mission. We address it in a particular way to you, our missionary brothers, who are carrying out in an outstanding and specific manner our missionary vocation.

By emphasising certain points that are more important for the future of missionary spirituality and activity of the Order, we wish to develop in all of us a growth in apostolic awareness, in order to give a new evangelising impetus to our missionaries, and, through them, new hope to the peoples to whom the "Good News" is proclaimed.

2. In studying our missionary life and activity during the Plenary Council, we have constantly kept in mind certain basic elements:

- current theological perspectives regarding the missionary situation of the Church, and the missionary demands made by reason of our Franciscan identity (nn. 4-15);
- the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious situations in the world of today, particularly those which affect our missionary work (nn.16-31);
- a number of specific structural problems (pastoral and juridical) concerning our missionary activity which are in particular need of updating (nn. 32-50).

The first part of the document is more doctrinal and brings together the principles which should shape our spirituality and missionary service.

3. Since the reform of the Capuchin Missions effected by Father Bernard of Andermatt, Minister General, and the missionary thrust of Pope Pius XI, the missionary activity of the Order and of the Church has shown continual progress over several decades. However, during the past few years the situation has been changing. We are living in a transitional period, of some difficulty and complexity, but we see it as a providential challenge, full of hope for the future.

The political scene, pastoral methods, the mentality of believers, and the new self-understanding of the Church have a considerable impact on our missionary commitment and attitudes.

The last two General Chapters the Order, sensitive to these "signs of the times", saw the need for a deeper study of this problem. (*cf. Analecta OFM Cap 92 [1976]181-182 and Acta Capituli Generalis LXXVII, 1974, p. 445, 111,3.*)

Hence the reason for this Plenary Council of the Order: to help clarify our responsibilities as preachers of the Gospel, responsibilities which emerge from an examination of the present situation and of the immediate future of the Church and the world.

"Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel" (Mk.16:15)

I. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

A. The Church and Mission

The mission of the Church

4. Christ Jesus, the Good News of God and first evangelizer, has handed on to all his disciples, and in a radical way to the community of faith which is the Church, the grace and vocation to evangelize. The Church's deepest identity is found in her essential mission to spread the Gospel. (*cf. E.N. 7:13-16*)

This mission consists in the proclamation of the Good News to mankind. In cooperation with the Spirit, evangelization is carried out by witnessing to and preaching the mystery of Christ in such a way that the Lord's Kingdom may come, through the transformation of man and the creation of a new world of justice and peace.

The mission of the Church, the people of God, through its evangelizing mission, "simultaneously manifests and exercises the mystery of God's love for man." (*cf. G.S 45; E.N. 18, 21, 22*)

"Missions"

5. This mission of the Church, which is essentially one, becomes multiple and diverse as it unfolds in practice, since it must take account of the actual situations and persons to whom the Gospel is preached.

In this sense the most specific and privileged form of evangelization, which is the primary task of the missionary Church, is the effort that is made to reach those who are "furthest from Christ"; (those who do not know Him, or who find themselves in de-Christianized environments, wherever they may be). (*cf. E.N. 51-52; A.G. 6*)

Hence, from a theological and existential point of view, this pre-eminent missionary activity of the Church goes beyond the narrow limits of the traditional concept of "Missions" – a concept which had precise territorial and administrative connotations.

Wherever there are people in need of explicit faith in Christ, in need of the first proclamation of the Good News, there is missionary activity par excellence.

Missionaries

6. Consequently, while recognizing the juridical features still in force in some of the so-called "Missions", we consider as missionaries all those who, so to speak, go beyond the boundaries of the "Christian community" to bring the message of Christ to peoples or groups of people who are in fact "furthest away from the Kingdom", in whatever continent or country they may be. During the age of "Christendom" it was the "Saracens and other unbelievers" who were considered to be furthest from the Kingdom of God, and they aroused Saint Francis' missionary spirit.

Contents of missionary activity

7. The content of missionary activity is the proclamation, by word and example, of the whole Gospel to men and women in all their dimensions.

The essential idea and aim of the Gospel message is this: to present Jesus, in a challenging and constructive way, as the reality which is the deciding factor in the life of the individual and of society.

Hence, evangelization inevitably has profound implications for the whole of human life, because its aim is to save humanity – the whole person, the human person as he or she really is - to bring the Good News of Christ the liberator, who is able to transform humanity from within at every level, and to make everyone a new and free person in a truly Christian sense, free from sin and its roots, selfishness, and free also from all consequences of sin, such as inhuman and de-personalizing situations and structures of every kind, individual or collective (socio-economic, political, religious, etc.). (*cf. E.N. 18, 29, 32.*)

"Christ's redemptive work, while of itself directed towards the salvation of people, also involves the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring people the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the Gospel." (*A.A. 5*)

Evangelization and human development

8. Consequently, for us there is no dichotomy between spiritual salvation and human development. On the contrary, there is an integration of these two values.

Certainly, our missionary activity does not stop short at human development, but by its evangelical leaven promotes and requires it, because the human person is the image of God.

Hence we must maintain a proper balance between evangelization and humanization or human development. Avoiding the one extreme of reducing the Gospel to mere faith and worship and the salvation of the soul, and the other extreme of radical commitment to human and social problems to the extent of using violence and revolution, we must preach complete salvation - the total liberation of men and women through Jesus Christ.

Our work of promoting human development and progress should spring from a clear concept of the human person in the light of faith, from an awareness that evangelization is not foreign to efforts made to overcome all that condemns people to remain at the margins of life : famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustice and oppression at every level. The scope of the evangelizer is pre-eminently whatever concerns human dignity and integrity. (*cf E.N. 30.*)

9. Our service should be preferably directed towards those brothers and sisters who are in most need of development, be it material or spiritual.

Hence our missionary work of total evangelization should have as its urgent and primary objective the service of those who, in addition to being "far from Christ", suffer from any kind of oppression and marginalization in society.

In doing this, we should not hesitate to speak out with evangelical prudence and courage when the situation demands it, having critically examined the facts and circumstances in the light of faith. We will do this by the example of our lives and by proclaiming the rights of truth and justice.

In any case we must be specifically careful to avoid ambiguities or compromises which might adulterate the purity of our message and the specific contribution of our service as religious.

In this connection there are two serious risks to avoid at all costs:

- the loss of a healthy evangelical freedom through binding ourselves to cultural or socio-political formulae that are relative, contingent and sometimes erroneous;
- the confusion of roles, by not respecting the diversity of tasks and services within the Church. Our contribution must always be marked by a clear fidelity to our character and to the duties which are specifically ours as religious, with a well-defined and responsible mission among the people of God. (*cf. EN. 66 and following.*)

B. Our Order in the Mission of the Church

Franciscan vocation = missionary vocation

10. Fundamentally, every Franciscan vocation is missionary. The Franciscan life-plan according to the Gospel implies, at its root, a natural apostolic dimension without limits, just as the Gospel of Jesus is without limits: "Go out to the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation." (*Mk. 16:15.*)

Saint Francis understood his own vocation and that of his friars in this sense: "God has chosen and sent the friars for the benefit and salvation of the souls of all peoples in this world. They will be welcomed not only in the countries of the faithful, but those of unbelievers as well, and they will win many souls." (*Mirror of Perfection, 65; cf. 1 Celano 35; St Bonaventure, Major Life, n, 2.*)

Hence our Order is rightly “an apostolic fraternity which fulfils its role of service in the Church by preaching the Gospel to all”. (*Consts. 140,4.*)

11. Among the various ways of fulfilling the apostolic charism of the Order is the one chosen by friars who, “living the Gospel life honestly, simply and joyfully” (*Consts.141, 1*), proclaim the Gospel in a particular context namely, among those who need it most because they are furthest away from Christ. (*cf. Consts. 140,3*)

This missionary task does not of itself imply either a special vocation different from that shared by all the friars, or a lifelong commitment.

Historically, in the medieval context, the apostolic mission among “the Saracens or other infidels” did have the connotation of a morally heroic act on account of the particular circumstances. Because of this, Saint Francis, who had a great respect for the personality of the friars and for the inspiration of God, sought a special certainty and guarantee.

Tasks which commit a person so deeply require - then as now - clearly supernatural motives and careful discernment on the part of the superiors of the fraternity. (*cf. 2 Celano 152; Earlier Rule 16; Approved Rule 12.*)

On the other hand missionary work does not, of its nature, presuppose a "life-long" commitment for the Franciscan, even though it can be seen as a special "charism" for some friars. In fact neither Saint Francis nor our legislation (until the latest Constitutions) raise any question about whether missionary service is temporary or not. Besides, the changed conditions in which missionary activity is exercised, now generally calling for a subsidiary role, offer us a providential opportunity to live out in practice the pilgrim character of the Franciscan vocation.

12. The specific Capuchin contribution to missionary activity is found in faithfulness, as individuals and in community, to our charism as *Friars and Minors*. This consists in incarnating the Gospel in our lives by joyfully and with simplicity revealing the Father's love for people. To be credible one must be genuine.

It is precisely because the missionary has to serve those who are furthest away from faith that his proclamation must have those particular personal qualities which ensure that the message will be more effective.

We believe that the leaven of the Franciscan missionary's presence should have these characteristics:

- *fraternity*: living as real brothers among ourselves and practising different styles of fraternal life with the people among whom we work;
- *minority*: living as true servants of all, humble, poor, respectful, peaceful, simple in life-style and in our relationships with others;
- *experience of the Spirit* in our own lives: showing that in all things we are truly “men of God”, attentive and open to any divine inspiration, whether direct or received through life and the experience of others;
- *sensitivity to the problems of integral human development*, so that our missionary presence may be a real incentive towards development, justice, dialogue and solidarity;
- *evangelical radicalism*: making us ever more generous, ready to accept the Cross and to show a sound pioneering spirit as a courageous response to the more urgent needs of mankind and the Church.

Some practical guidelines

13. We would like to add a few guidelines, in line with the basic traits of our Franciscan identity, concerning the method to be followed by our missionary friars in their life and activity:

- first and foremost, Saint Francis' golden rule: preach always the living sermon of one's own life - being meek, peaceful, fraternal, genuine Christians. (*cf. Earlier Rule,16; EN. 21,41-42*);
- then, bearing in mind our condition as brothers regardless of any clerical status, we should try to actualize the missionary potential which all our fellow-friars have in virtue of the Franciscan charism;
- in perfect harmony with our character as an "apostolic fraternity" (*cf. Consts.140,3*), we should try to plan and to carry out missionary tasks in close fellowship with one another, as a work of the fraternity rather than of particular individuals, avoiding gestures of individualism and lack of solidarity. We should be real brothers, and united among ourselves, "so that the world may believe" (*Jn. 17: 21-22*);
- faithful to the demands of minority, we should aim to reach people's hearts through dialogue, respect, listening, understanding and acceptance. While we are the bearers of the Message and of certain values, we should at the same time be disposed to accept the message and values possessed by others - proclaiming the Lord while knowing how to listen humbly as He speaks through everything and through all the brothers and sisters.

On the other hand, our attitude of minority will make it easier for us to communicate and work with them, after the example of Christ who became a man among men in order to serve them and save them.

- Imitating the pastoral method of Saint Francis, particularly with those furthest away from faith, we should know how to reduce the content of our Christian catechesis to the essential core of the Gospel - the Good News of Jesus as Saviour, and of fraternal love.
- Notwithstanding our preference always to preach the Gospel to "the poor", we should not forget the example of Saint Francis who also proclaimed the Gospel of conversion, truth, peace and good will to the powerful and to the leaders of nations.
- Saint Francis, by his personal example and his words, wanted to underline a characteristic element of our minority which should be seen in the life and activity of the missionary friars: a readiness to accept the cross and martyrdom. This is the way and the method of any genuinely Christian evangelization like that of Jesus (*cf. Earlier Rule,16; 1 Celano 55-57; 2 Celano 30, 152; Analecta Franciscana III, Quaracchi 1897, p.21*).

Fidelity to missionary duty

14. The obligation of the Church and of every disciple of Christ to respond to the missionary call is fully binding even today.

Although the Lord has a merciful judgement in store for those who have no explicit knowledge of Him and who try to live in accordance with an upright conscience, Saint Paul feels the grave duty to evangelize the gentiles: "I should be punished if I did not preach the Gospel" (*1 Cor. 9: 16; Rom. 2:14 and following; L.G.16.*), and the Lord's command to "proclaim the Good News to all creation" (*Mk. 16: 15*) will always be relevant.

Besides, missionary work is essential to the Church, since the very reason for her existence is to witness to the mystery of Christ, to “reveal and to communicate the love of God to all people and nations” (*A.G.10*).

On the personal level, every disciple of Jesus has a specific missionary responsibility ~ following logically from faith and from the intrinsic dynamism within religious experience itself.

Explicit faith in Christ the Lord is born only through direct proclamation to those who do not know Him: “How will they believe in him unless they have heard about him? And how can they hear of him unless they get a preacher? ...” (*Rom. 10: 14*).

A genuine experience of Christianity inevitably impels a person to communicate to others the values and riches of religion. Faith, lived out in practice, is necessarily missionary. “What we have seen and heard, we are telling you, so that you too may be in union with us, as we are in union with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ” (*1 Jn.1: 3*).

- 15.** Consequently, the more each person consecrates himself to Christ and the Church, the more he feels obliged to dedicate himself to Christ's cause.

This is why religious “find in their consecrated life a privileged means of evangelization” (*E.N. 26*). “The more ardently they unite themselves to Christ through a self-surrender involving their entire lives, the more vigorous the life of the Church becomes and the more abundantly her apostolate bears fruit” (*P.C. 1*).

Our charism as Franciscans gives greater and special force to the missionary zeal conferred by the religious vocation we share. Our missionary activity is imbued with the strong example of Saint Francis, and is the fruit of an intense experience of “the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation”, and of the evangelical and apostolic essence of Franciscanism. But it is also the spontaneous and natural expression of our spirit of fraternity and minority. Since the central content of evangelization is witness to the Father’s love and to the brotherhood of all people revealed by Christ (*cf EN. 26*), our identity logically leads us to missionary service, as a fraternal gesture precisely towards those who most need to experience the fact that they are sons of the Father and brothers to all.

Rightly, therefore, “our Order accepts as its own the task of evangelization ... and regards and undertakes this missionary work as one of its principal apostolic obligations” (*Consts.174, 3*). And likewise rightly, each one of us can say with the Apostle: It IS my duty to preach the Gospel” (*1 Cor. 9: 16*).

“When the Friars go about in the world ” (*Earlier Rule, 14*)

II. NEW CONTEXTS

Same Mission in a new world

- 16.** Saint Francis after his “conversion” made the decision “to go out in the world.”

In the same way he wished to send his friars throughout the world after the manner of the Apostles, in poverty, with full trust in God as Father, bringing peace everywhere, not just as a form of greeting, but as a living experience. (*cf. Earlier Rule,14; Lk. 9: 10*)

The friars who go into today’s world, in a more radical form, that is, outside of Christianity- “among the Saracens and other infidels” - cannot but take account of the fact that

missionary activity is much changed. In the past, classic means were churches, chapels, schools, hospitals, etc. Today there are also new situations demanding new responses and new forms.

If we attempt to describe some of these situations, it is to specify what should be the response of a Friar Minor.

Such situations are found in typical fashion in the Southern Continents, but not exclusively. The suggested responses are the fruit of the experience of many friars.

If in the near future the great majority of Catholics and humanity will be living in the so-called Third World, how much this fact ought to stimulate the Friar Minor to carry the dynamic of hope to that world.

A. New Ecclesial Contexts

Particular Churches

17. In the diversity of situations, which vary from country to country and which cannot be reduced to a common denominator, there emerges the new dimension of *particular* or *local Churches*.

This idea has been developed theologically in many texts of the Second Vatican Council and since. While Vatican I had placed the accent on the Universal Church and on centralization, Vatican II, completing the theology of the previous Council, highlighted the doctrine of the Episcopate and of particular Churches: the dioceses, but also parishes and small communities. These do not belong to the Church; they *are* the Church of Christ. (cf. L.G. 26.) While each has its own partial autonomy and its particular characteristics in theology, liturgy and discipline, all of them together, in communion with the other Churches under the Bishop of Rome, form the *Katholiké*, which is not so much the result of a juridical structure but of being united in the word of God, in the one sacrifice and in charity, a union that translates itself into mutual interest and help.

A practical and juridical consequence of this is clear in the Instruction of the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples (formerly known as Propaganda Fide) of 24th February, 1969. Formerly, the “jus commissionis” was in force, according to which defined territories had been entrusted to specific missionary Institutes, which had complete responsibility for them. Now, not missionary Institutes but particular Churches, dioceses, are responsible for themselves, even if they can, as is clear, take the Institutes into their service on the basis of some form of contract, envisaged in the same Instruction.

18. In this situation the missionaries are now changed from being dynamic founders of Churches into collaborators, from men of initiative and of autonomous decision-making into listeners, men of dialogue and, to a certain degree, of obedience and availability. In taking this second place, in this detachment, the Friar Minor finds himself in his own natural setting, with the opportunity to live his identity in availability and minority more authentically. He presents himself neither as a superior nor as an inferior, but as a brother. He does not impose himself but offers himself. He is no longer “sent” after a unilateral decision by the mother Church, but is rather “invited” by a particular Church that has need of his service and only for as long as he is needed.

These particular Churches must still grow and mature both as regards clergy and as a community. They have their human and fragile aspects, yet they are sources of faith and hope. The Friars Minor try to find their place in the particular Churches, thinking and speaking of them in a positive way, considering it a principal aim of their work to create

possibilities for a Church that will be able to govern itself, become financially self-sufficient - even able to spread itself, since each local Church, after the model of the Universal Church, must be missionary. (cf. A. G. 20)

Our missionaries have understood that the purpose of their presence is to form local leaders, clergy, religious, catechists, and lay people capable of taking a part in social and political advancement. We wish to encourage them to dedicate themselves to the formation of Christian communities, to promote among them different ministries, giving them greater responsibility and so making themselves, gradually, less necessary. It is by being present in a more spiritual way that their presence ensures communion with the sister Churches and with the Universal Church under the Bishop of Rome.

With this attitude of lesser brothers, the missionaries will be there to serve the local Churches, avoiding the risk of becoming an internal pressure group or an opposition group.

Capuchins in the Third World

19. Our friars have made their contribution towards founding the particular Churches in the three southern continents. An interesting aspect of our presence is this: from 1922 - 1972, Capuchins in "our Missions", for the most part foreigners, grew from 594 to 1,590 (an average annual increase of 20). From 1972 to 1977, however, foreign missionaries decreased at the rate of about 30 a year. Their place has been taken by local friars, in such a way that the total number remains practically the same. The phenomenon clearly shows that our type of presence is being transformed.

B. The New Socio - Economic and Political Context

New situations as challenges

20. The Second Vatican Council no longer spoke of the Church and the world, as one alongside the other, but of the Church in the world and of the world. "The joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ." (G.S. 1)

In recent years the situation of the Church in not a few countries has changed. Many reports sent from our missionaries refer to the difficulties in which they find themselves with governments and the uncertainty of not knowing for how long they can remain and whether they will be expelled. It is true that apart from what happened in China not so long ago and what has happened in individual cases, up to now we have not had further expulsions. But their uncertain future alone is enough to worry them psychologically.

Certainly, the Church cannot indulge in an introversion that centres on itself. In one way or another it must commit itself to live in today's world without nostalgia for the past and without recourse to an unreal flight from the world. Every new situation presents a new challenge.

The Friar Minor accepts these new historical realities in poverty of spirit, with faith in Divine Providence and with serenity, but also with critical eyes, and he rises to the occasion with prophetic courage, if necessary, because he preserves the freedom of the children of God and is a stranger to fear. He knows it is not enough to be concerned simply with saving individuals in these situations, but rather to judge these same situations in the light of the Gospel, to push for those changes which favour the advent of God's new world and to live them personally in a creative and exemplary way.

Autonomous States

21. In the last decades the so-called “missionary countries”, once predominantly colonies, have become autonomous states. The foreign missionary no longer enjoys the authority and privileges of the past, but here too has to take second place.

The lesser brother accepts this situation, neither stressing nor criticizing the insufficiencies of the young states (corruption, tribalism, inept administration etc.), but rejoices that these people are moving towards their own dignity and their own identity. He recognizes that decolonization has also impelled the Church to promote the native clergy and to encourage a greater sense of responsibility among the Christian communities. He is a witness - after the struggle for political independence - of the struggle for economic independence, the drive to break the vicious circle of underdevelopment by fighting ignorance, disease and poverty.

The Friar Minor feels solidarity with the “lesser ones” and, as a tireless animator, shares in the efforts of the people and of governments, be it by encouragement or by putting his hand to the common effort. He does this because he knows that a person’s effort to be free from misery and to ensure a life worthy of men and women as children of God “is not extraneous evangelization”. (*E. N. 30*)

Systems of National Security

22. In not a few countries of Latin America and of the Far East there is a preponderance of systems known as “national security” regimes. According to this ideology, the basic rights of the individual are completely subordinated to the needs of the nation, or rather of a privileged group, in collaboration with international capitalism. Such States do not wish to share riches with the poor in any way. They apply in time of peace the strategy of war-time to “maintain order”, so that, in practice, any attempt to rise against injustices is suppressed. Often the dominant class claims to be Christian and controls religion in order to impede any inflow of “dangerous ideas”. Such governments are a scandal to the Christian name. Many Bishops and many Episcopal Conferences have condemned these regimes characterized by collective injustice and institutionalized violence.

The Friar Minor, in such a situation, preaches the entire Gospel, which has much to do with human dignity and justice. He cannot avoid risks. Mission has always been a risk. It belongs primarily to the local hierarchy and to the people, not to foreign missionaries, to make public protest in such cases. But if the foreign missionaries believe that they ought to speak, such a decision should always be taken as a fraternity.

There is a Franciscan way of being present in socio-political struggles, made up of intransigence and fraternity, of confrontation and a spirit of peace. And all have need of this witness. The friars in such situations must be sure to have objective information. They should be understanding of those who in desperation have recourse to violence, not always motivated by hate, but often by a love of justice. However, they, as Franciscans, choose another method, that of being one with Christ in the “kenosis” of non-violence and of trust in the power of the non-violent. Without equivocation, let them take an active part in peace movements and in organizations against the injustices of dictatorships, be they left or right-wing.

Our reservations regarding countries with ‘national security’ regimes do not mean to ignore the contribution these make towards economic development.

International Capitalism

23. The same attitude is valid for the system of international capitalism, which with the advantage of free trade, solicits unlimited competition and the insatiable desire for profit. Often it does not respect fundamental human rights, such as the right of people to receive from their work that which is necessary for their livelihood, to which the right to private property and free trade ought to be subordinated. (*cf. Populorum Progressio* 22) Often it destroys even the balance of natural ecology and exploits the economy of poor countries, thereby condemning them to becoming ever more so.

The Capuchin missionary tries to make the poor more self-aware and to prepare them to defend their rights. Also, through frank discussion, the friars of the Third and of the First Worlds will seek to influence the decisions of governments and of multinational companies.

These brief indications show us that the theology of redemption becomes, in many actual situations, a theology of liberation which has had a strong impact on the socio-economic and political realities.

We must have these human and Christian perspectives of liberation clearly in view when faced with any kind of discrimination, for example, when “apartheid” is in effect, when minority groups face various kinds of oppression, when anti-conversion laws are the law of the land, and so forth.

Marxist Regimes

24. The political upheavals of recent times have also placed the Church in confrontation with Marxist regimes. More than half of Asia and a great part of Africa and Europe, for example, have Marxist governments. Marxism has imposed itself almost always as a reaction to harsh feudal conditions, colonialist or capitalist, and as a liberation movement. However, we have yet to see verified anywhere the perfect revolution. New injustices have replaced the old and the people are victims of a new oppression and of inhuman restriction of freedom.

The Friar Minor knows that Marxism, in as much as it is scientific materialism, denies God and seeks to destroy the Church, religion and the sense of the mystery of the human person. But he also believes with great confidence that this ideology cannot prevail. We already have the evidence of history that the Church can survive by becoming more evangelical and by ridding itself of so much traditional conditioning. The Franciscan position in the face of Marxism is therefore:

- to re-awaken faith in the power of the Gospel and in the grace of the risen Christ;
- to remain with the people, to share with them the harsh conditions of life and to make sure that they do not lose their filial trust in the Father;
- to recognise common initiatives and to work for the good of the people in all that is not against the Gospel, in the struggle against underdevelopment so that all may have living conditions worthy of a human being;
- not to go against Marxism as any kind of representative of other systems, e.g., of Capitalism, but to go among the Communists and dialogue with them, just as Saint Francis, despite the adverse systems of his time, went to the Sultan, spoke with him, man to man, and then sent his friars "among" the Saracens, not against them;
- to believe firmly in the fundamental goodness of people and to hope that even Communists can gradually learn from history, that is from their mistakes, and thus to develop a more adequate interpretation of humanity and the world.

C. New Context of a Pluralistic Society

a) New Cultural Contexts

The problem of cultures

25. While western technology is becoming universal, the cultures of different peoples are in a period of rebirth after centuries of European dominance. It is true that the problem of cultures has taken second place to the problem of revolution and of liberation from poverty. However, the first remains of greatest importance because man, beyond economic progress, aspires to have a cultural environment which he finds himself "at home".

It is one of the sacrifices of the missionary to renounce, to a certain extent, his own culture and customs, and to immerse himself as far as is possible in the language and culture of the people. He will appreciate their cultural values and sing the Canticle of Creatures on seeing the love, the sense of community, the dignity and the joy of the people: because it is all created by Him and through Him! With this theological interpretation the Gospel will more easily be "incarnated" within cultures and be made to take on local forms. (cf. *EN*. 63)

b) New Religious Context

Religious Liberty

26. We claim for the Church the right to religious liberty and the possibility to preach the Gospel in the whole world, and for each Christian the right to practice his or her own faith without discrimination. (cf. *EN*. 39) The other aspect of the same religious liberty and of conscience, affirmed by the Conciliar document "Dignitatis humanae", is that each person has the right to follow his or her own conscience. Christianity is not imposed, but offered to a free person.

Young Churches too need to grow and mature in evangelical freedom and, as a consequence, come to a generous tolerance of legitimate pluriformity.

Non-Christian religions

27. The subject of non-Christian religions has become one of primary importance. During the period of European predominance, Christianity was almost automatically regarded as the one religion worthy of the name. Today, religions have reached greater self-awareness and we must review many of our past claims. The more we deepen our knowledge of these religions by means of real contact and dialogue, the more we appreciate and admire them, even though they may contain sinful and erroneous aspects.

While fully recognising the one Saviour Jesus Christ and the Church as the universal sacrament of salvation, many theologians of today accept that other religions also can be ways of salvation and that Christ is already at work among them through His Spirit. The mercy of God in fact is without limit and makes no discrimination between the elect and the non-elect, "but anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him." (*Acts 10: 35*)

The Friar Minor rejoices in this evaluation of the religious world. He praises the Lord for the wonders He accomplishes among all his peoples. He will seek dialogue and common prayer in order to give and receive the gifts of the experience of God. Mutual visits, especially on the occasion of religious feasts, will be a sign of a growing universal

brotherhood. Also, such contacts will open the way towards shared undertakings among all people of good will for greater justice and peace in the world.

Dialogue and Mission

- 28.** And so dialogue and mission are two stages in the journey towards God. They are no longer alternatives. Missionary activity cannot be exercised without dialogue. Dialogue as such has its own worth: two people of different faiths meet together, open up to each other, appreciate each other, admire each other, enrich each other. It is left to the Spirit of the One God to determine whether such meetings will result in the desire and possibility, not only of sharing one's experience of God, but also of changing one's faith.

Ecumenism

- 29.** If there should be new relationships with non-Christians, how much more ought we to move towards a new fellowship with non-Catholic Christians.

Ecumenism, entering strongly into the Church's consciousness with Pope John XXIII and the Council, has provided the impetus to overcome the scandal that divided Churches have exported to peoples in need of the Gospel.

Capuchins should be protagonists of the ecumenical Church! All common initiatives at local level, on social, political and religious matters are to be encouraged, without denying loyalty to one's own belief. May Saint Francis, much appreciated by non-Catholic Christians, give us his language and evangelical heart!

Secularization

- 30.** 30. One particular current no continent can escape is secularization. Many Christians, and even many adherents of non-Christian religions, "emigrate" from their own systems and from their own religious structures. They do not become purely and simply a-religious, but they do abandon many concepts, ties and myths. They go their own way, becoming "religious nomads".

Secularization is of itself a positive process that can give to the cultural and scientific world legitimate autonomy (cf. *G.S.* 59), while not denying faith in God, the Creator and ultimate mystery of man.

The Friar Minor, with great attention to the sensibilities of modern people, will ask himself:

- what myths, bound up with past world views, and what time-bound forms, can be dropped without betraying the content of the faith?
- what is the permanent core of the gospel message that we can proclaim in modern language?
- how can we free people from a magic mentality, from superstition, from a false seeking after "graces and miracles"?
- instead, how can we promote human values - objectivity, honesty, courage, joy, love, fidelity - and unveil, in all the realities of the so-called "profane" world, the transcendental dimension? (cf. *EN.* 70)
- how can we transpose biblical experience into today's terms, convinced that Christian life finds its place in history and not beyond it? How can we experience the closeness

of God in the midst of political and social struggle and not in an imaginary flight from them?

- how can we, finally, walk alongside the “religious nomads” in order to interpret their existence and proclaim the word of salvation in their lives?
- is this not also a Franciscan way of “going into the world” of today?

Secularism

- 31.** 31. A more radical phenomenon is secularism, which denies the very existence of God with an atheism that is either pragmatic or systematic and militant. The new facts of present salvation history are these: there are in Christian countries, individuals and whole groups of people who are non-practising or who do not believe at all. (cf. *EN. 55-56*) Faced with these, the Church must "constantly seek the proper means and language for presenting or re-presenting to them God's revelation and faith in Jesus Christ." (*EN.56*) Therefore there are today in all countries of the Six Continents “missionary situations” which constitute a tremendous challenge for believers.

The Friar Minor is not intimidated by this situation. Not theoretically, but through his presence and witness, he seeks to live among these brothers and sisters who are truly “far away”, to eliminate many prejudices, to encourage a certain longing for the transcendent. In this connection, special acknowledgement is due to those friars who, for example, look after the working world of those who apply themselves to systematic house-to-house visitation in large cities. But all the friars, through their preaching and work with groups, can help Christians to realise that they are not such only for their own benefit but also for the good of others; by their lives they are to give credible witness to the secularized and indifferent masses.

“The Spirit of Truth will guide you” (*Jn.16: 15*)

III. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Practical guidelines

- 32.** What we have said so far needs to be effectively applied in the renewal of our attitudes and missionary work. A new theology of mission, new principles of missionary propaganda and new situations in the world and in the Church call for a new way of expressing our missionary action and cooperation, different from the old.

In this third section, some practical guidelines are given which will help us to respond better to the demands made today by the missionary dimension of our life.

The "Spirit of Truth" will guide each of us in this renewal, and will help us to make these suggestions become part of the varied social and religious situations in which we are called to live.

Point of departure

- 33.** We see this Plenary Council of the Order as a starting-point for an updated arrangement of our missionary work. We therefore wish to invite all our confreres to reflect carefully on the conclusions that have emerged from this privileged meeting of the Order.

Let this document be the object of profound study by all, especially by the missionaries, in such a way that they are in fact helped to reconsider their life and activity.

A. Reassessment of Our Apostolic Services

- 34.** One primary practical consequence will be the duty to reassess at every level our pastoral vision and our service to the Church and the world of today. This reassessment is demanded in view of the special character of our missionary vocation.
- In its proposals and decisions, the entire Order should show that it has understood the true value and dimension of the missionary ideal. The Order should feel that in each of its members it is witnessing to and preaching the Good News. Making its specific contribution to the development of the local Church by carefully propagating its spiritual heritage and its charism of minority, the Order will feel itself to be universal and Catholic.
 - The Provinces, in their turn, should honestly rethink their apostolic commitments in the light of the missionary situation today. Missionary work should be close to the heart of the Province, wherever and however it is exercised.
 - The decline of our missionary personnel obliges us, perhaps providentially, to reassess our missionary presence and commitments. Let the missionary friar devote himself to his specific work, leaving other offices and duties to lay people, to the Christian community, and to the various co-workers.

B. Programme of Missionary Awareness and Formation

Missionary awareness

- 35.** If the Order is to fulfil adequately and ever more effectively this important apostolic duty, we need to plan an ongoing programme to improve missionary awareness and formation among all the friars.

The life, activity and prayer of the Provinces should be imbued with the missionary ideal. A Province without the missionary spirit is bound to stagnate and eventually disappear.

This missionary spirit should be seen most clearly in the fact that the Province considers missionary activity as one of its principal apostolic duties.

The idea of “our missions” and “our territories” is finished. It is therefore important that all should try to assimilate and deepen their grasp of the new dimension in missionary activity: namely, that it is a service of a particular church in a spirit of fellowship.

By means of an adequate analysis of the missionary dimension in present-day ecclesiology, all should be brought to see that missionary activity today is psychologically more complex than in the past.

The new situations regarding personnel and the apostolate compel us to realise that qualification and training are basic requirements for any missionary service. Rather than count how many missionaries a Province has, we should consider who they are and what preparation they have received.

For the work of fostering missionary awareness to be effective, the Provinces should exchange qualified personnel who have experience in this field. Through this kind of exchange of values and services on an inter-ecclesial and fraternal basis, the missionary spirit of the Order will be more easily renewed.

Formation

- 36.** To safeguard this missionary dimension it is absolutely indispensable that the Order as a whole, and each Province in particular, should promote proper formation and re-training on missionary questions. This should be available to all the friars, not only to those actually engaged in this important aspect of our apostolic vocation.

For this purpose:

- the Provinces should provide a deeper theology and spirituality of the missionary dimension of our Franciscan charism, so as to bring about real renewal of the apostolate;
- formation personnel should be conscious of the apostolic value of our identity as religious. In forming our young candidates, let them strive to bring out the doctrinal and practical consequences of missionary problems, and their repercussions on our Franciscan life. Above all, as the Church intends, they should stress the missionary dimension in the teaching of theology (*cf. A. G. 39*);
- courses of study and in-service training should be available to all, covering missionary theology, catechetics and evangelization, and including documented information about the Order's missionary commitments;
- in the light of the Church's evangelizing mission and the efforts made by our missionary friars, the aim should be to provide the brothers with appropriate information to make them aware of international problems, and sensitive to the socio-economic, political, cultural, and in general, human independence of the various peoples;
- the friars should be properly informed about the documents of the Holy See, the Order and the Episcopal Conferences dealing with missionary topics, and they should carefully study and reflect on them.

- 37.** The formation of our missionary friars requires altogether special care. First of all, brothers destined for missionary activity should have adequate specific preparation regarding the religious, anthropological, cultural, socio-economic, political and historical aspects of the people among whom they will work.

This preparation can take various forms: for example:

- specialized studies before leaving for the mission, living together with qualified priests and religious of the place for a period of time, academic studies (preferably done in the place of work), a serious orientation programme conducted by the missionaries themselves or in collaboration with other missionary institutes and with the local church, etc. In any case, the new missionaries should not be involved in direct apostolate before acquiring adequate preparation in the field, in the place where they will work;
- secondly, the Provinces should be particularly careful to provide for the on-going formation of missionaries already involved in the apostolate. Since missionaries are called not only to be pastors but to form others as well, this ongoing formation should take account of the various aspects of their personality: human, religious, intellectual, professional, and so forth;
- there are many opportunities for this kind of "ongoing Formation", such as days of spiritual renewal, of living together and study, organised from time to time;
- specialised courses on particular themes conducted on the spot;

- attending selected courses during holidays on theological matters, on Franciscan spirituality, on pastoral or other topics useful for the missionary's personal formation, or directly related to his missionary work;
- the so-called "sabbatical year" after a period of missionary activity - a prolonged and systematic programme of in-service training and spiritual renewal.

C. Some Fundamental Choices

- 38.** The new perspectives in missionary service compel us to plan our apostolic life and activity in conformity with certain fundamental choices. We wish to emphasise only three of them which are of particular importance: Franciscan authenticity, implantation of the Order and pastoral choices.

Franciscan Authenticity

The genuineness and fruitfulness of our missionary work will depend fundamentally upon evangelical fidelity to our Franciscan vocation.

Above all, our missionaries should aim to be seen as true men of faith and prayer. If, through perseverance and constant prayer, their life remains rooted in an uninterrupted communion with God, that in itself will be a living proclamation of the Gospel, revealing the Holy Spirit, the principal agent and goal of evangelization. (*cf. A.G. 25; EN. 41,75; Consts. 33*)

This will make it easier to reveal to all a true image of men of poverty, minority and genuine fraternity. The community dimension, typical of our profession as "brothers", must be lived by our missionaries with profound dedication, in spite of the material difficulties inherent in our duties and places of work. The value of fraternal life and the possibility of living it effectively must always be safeguarded.

Implantation of the Order

- 39.** The new dimension of particular churches and the statistics regarding missionary personnel (decline of foreign missionaries and the increase of local vocations) compel us to pay particular attention to indigenous vocations.

Let information centres be set up to spread Franciscan life and spirituality, so that the work of preaching the Gospel and building up the local Church may be achieved more effectively.

All the friars should be concerned for the work of implanting the Order; formation of candidates should be entrusted to those best qualified, and Superiors should not hesitate to withdraw them, for this purpose, from other apostolates of direct evangelization.

In keeping with our spirit of availability and pluriformity, large structures should not be created for the purpose of establishing the Order; but, attentive to the style of life in the various nations and particular churches, we must set up our centres of Franciscan life. Where possible and appropriate, different provinces and regions should unite in doing this as an example of cooperation. Thus this new Capuchin experience will witness to the unity of the whole Order, rather than to the exclusiveness of historical and geographical divisions.

The Order should have a specific programme, apostolic and spiritual, whereby it establishes itself in the nerve-centres of the countries where the Church and Order are younger.

Pastoral choices

40. Without claiming to give an exhaustive list of today's more important options (and leaving aside pluriformity in contexts and situations) we would like, however, to emphasise some of them.
- Sacred Scripture: Saint Francis has left us a wonderful example of zeal for the Word of God. Sacred Scripture has an altogether special role in our missionary activity, and it ought to be the “magna charta” and foundation of our evangelization. Therefore, in our missionary activity, let us give first place to propagating the Scriptures, translating them where necessary, and teaching the people to read and live them, in ecumenical collaboration. (*cf. Dei Verbum 22*).
 - Evangelization and Sacramentalization: We should always seek to effect a correct balance between evangelization and sacramentalization. The sacraments must always be seen as the completion of a careful and arduous process of evangelization. Moreover, evangelization should not end with the reception of the sacraments, but continue to give life to the sacraments already received, by means of constant catechesis. (*cf. E.N.47*)
 - Popular piety: While realising the need to stress the essential values of the faith, we should also recognise the value of popular piety (*cf. EN. 48*). This popular piety, when purified of unhealthy and mistaken elements, can be a way to the experience of God. Let us not forget that Saint Francis celebrated Christmas with a group of simple folk, and promoted the medieval devotion to the Passion of Christ. We should leave the people free to express themselves spontaneously, taking care however that these manifestations of popular piety nourish faith, hope and charity.
 - Service of the poor: Let us choose to live for the poor and with the poor. Our first concern should be to do everything to free them from their poverty through genuine human development. On the other hand, we have much to learn from these people. Those friars are worthy of praise who choose to live closer to the poor and to share with them the daily hardships of their poverty. Thus we shall keep alive the healthy tension between structure and the demands of poverty – a tension present throughout our history.
 - Basic Christian communities: This experience was recommended to the whole Church in the 1974 Synod of Bishops. There are many varieties of such movements, arising from the initiative of committed laity, and their aim is to form authentic Christians who will live the Word of God with a deep sense of community, and will seek to change the world from within its structures. As lesser brothers, close to the people and sensitive to expressions of spontaneous faith and biblical spirituality, we will back up such groups with the animating spirit of Saint Francis.
 - The Secular Franciscan Fraternity: Let us not forget that the Secular Franciscan Fraternity has been recognised by the Church “as a leaven of evangelical perfection”. (*Const. 151, 1*) We should esteem and value the spiritual gifts of so many brothers and sisters who share our spirit and service. In this way we will bring to maturity a community of faith and love, gifted with particular effectiveness in the preaching of the Gospel, such as Saint Francis desired and people of our time expect.

D. Possibilities for Co-operation

41. As a result of the new concept and plan for evangelization, our attitude to co-operation also calls for renewal. Co-operation among Provinces in a given region, and among the local

Churches in the various forms of missionary activity and service, should be sought and encouraged by every means. In the spirit of our Constitutions, we would recommend a fraternal sharing even of personnel, so that those areas of our missionary activity which are in greatest need may be effectively helped. We also encourage a fraternal and generous cooperation, in ways that are most appropriate, with all the Franciscan families, both of men and women.

We should also remember that the particular church cannot be said to be fully established without a variety of spiritual dimensions and experiences - a variety that is contributed by the different religious institutes. Therefore it is desirable that in a particular missionary context there should be this variety of presence. This implies reducing the monopoly of presence enjoyed by one institute; such a monopoly sometimes hinders the growth of diversity of expression in the particular church.

We wish to underline the need for lay people to be involved in our work of evangelization at every level: those from abroad who are spiritually and technically trained and accepted for a particular task; and local people, who are formed and prepared for the service of their particular church.

It is not enough that our missionaries work hard and at great cost *for* others, but they must work *with* others. Therefore, let them neither do nor plan anything without reference to the local church or do anything that is outside the interests of that church.

Genuine missionary activity and cooperation are not a one-way process. The young churches also have a message to give to the old churches and to our Provinces, enriching them with their religious, cultural, social and political values. The principal agent of this "reverse mission" is the missionary himself. He will find his periodical visits to the Province fitting occasions for performing this excellent duty of inter-ecclesial cooperation.

E. Channels of Animation

42. The Mission Secretariats should primarily be centres of missionary and inter-ecclesial animation.

The friars who are put in charge of these secretariats should be well trained and mission-minded, dedicating themselves to study, documentation, research and inspiration.

This animation should take place both within the Order itself and in the particular churches where we are: parishes, groups, mass media and in other civil and religious organisations.

Our work of animation should be integrated into the local church. It should be entrusted, as far as possible, not to an individual but to a team or to a fraternity, which will be ready to perform this service.

In planning missionary propaganda, let us avoid all forms of it which do not command respect. We should avoid creating a missionary awareness containing elements which are not at all suitable or helpful for the growth of a people and of the particular church. Exhibitions, days of missionary promotion, publications, etc., should emphasise the positive message of the local values of the people among whom the missionaries live and work.

Besides its normal duties, our General Secretariat for the Missions should also be a centre for research, inspiration and documentation at the service of the General Superiors and of the whole Order, to further our missionary presence in the world and to develop a more profound and authentic missionary awareness among ourselves.

Financial help which we are able to send to the “missions” should be properly balanced in the light of the various needs and distributed with the consent of the Superiors.

F. Economic Problems

43. It is generally agreed that finances are not one of our urgent and disturbing problems. On the contrary, in certain places and circumstances, abundance of means has proved harmful: houses not in tune with the environment in which they are built, disproportionate and useless projects which had to be eventually closed down, excessive means of communication, technical aids certainly not in keeping with the circumstances, a lifestyle too much at variance with that of the people among whom we are called upon to live, etc.

Our missionaries should place themselves on an equal footing with other missionaries in the local church with regard to administration, having the same helps, subsidies, contracts and temporary commitments.

Administration and planning of initiatives should be done in common, and should not be reserved only to the Superior, much less to the individual religious. Our vow of poverty and our profession of minority have an altogether special value for each one of us; hence private means and all kinds of expenses and projects, individually planned and financed, are forbidden to us.

Those “missions” are praiseworthy where each year or several times a year, the missionaries meet together to take common decisions regarding the expenditure for the apostolate, for buildings, for means of communication and everyday needs, etc.

The missionary should not be anxious to build huge projects, but rather those that are modest and self-sufficient, in such a way that, even when he leaves, they can continue functioning without great difficulty and without further financial help.

On the other hand, from the viewpoint of authentic development, the missionary should not ignore the real possibilities he has of arousing the desire of the people for community development which might possibly be supported by big organisations or international co-operation.

G. Juridical Adjustments

44. The reflections contained in the preceding pages bring us to certain juridical conclusions which cannot be ignored, because they embody in practical form everything that has been said in nn. 32-43 of this document.

Here then are some conclusions, which the Plenary Council of the Order presents to the General Definitory or General Chapter, according to the respective competence of each, for the specific restructuring of our missionary presence and activity.

Mission and Province

45. Our present missions should be changed into vice-provinces, if necessary by merging them with neighbouring vice-provinces and missions, when this is possible in the opinion of the General Definitory, keeping in mind nn. 98, 3 and 99, 1 of our Constitutions.

If there is only one mission dependent on one Province in a single region, the transition to a vice-province or province can be very easy, since the constituent elements are the same.

But it must be pointed out that in fact, the mentality and psychology of the missionaries need to be change. A new entity actually comes into being, which must look, with greater clarity, for its own identity as a local church, in all its dimensions, including that of implanting the Order. All foreign missionaries would have to be enrolled in the new juridical entity, as real members of it. However, they will always retain the freedom to return to the province of their origin if they wish to do so in the future.

As far as the relationship between vice-provinces and provinces is concerned, this is already foreseen in the Constitutions, since in this case the new vice-province always depends on the province.

If two or more provinces have missions in the same region, a single vice-province or province should be formed there. If a vice-province is formed, it will depend upon the Minister General.

In this case, since more than one Province is involved, the group of foreign missionaries, as well as the indigenous friars, should be represented on the vice-provincial council. In this way, the necessary coordination and contact with the individual provinces will be ensured. Here some kind of regional form of government could be tried. The relationship with the provinces should be determined by contract.

If more than one province works in the same mission, a single province or a vice-province dependent on the Minister General should be established, as in the previous case.

The vice-provincial council should be composed of as many councillors as there are missionary groups.

In this case also, all the members would belong to the new vice-province, with freedom to return to the province of origin when they so desire.

As in the previous case, there should be a contract to regulate the relationship between the vice-province and the provinces in question, with regard to personnel, finances and other matters.

Custodies

- 46.** The Plenary Council of the Order proposes that those missions which cannot be erected into vice-provinces or provinces should be called custodies. However, this terminology cannot be used before the General Chapter pronounces upon its merits.

Their juridical status will be that of the present missions according to the Constitutions.

Delegations

- 47.** Delegations which exist in regions where there are already provinces or vice-provinces (Custodies) should be integrated into these jurisdictions.

However, delegations which are in regions where no other structure of the Order exists shall be called custodies.

The Custos shall have those faculties granted to him by the General or the Provincial as the case may be. The General Superiors are urged not to permit this kind of presence in the future when there is no assurance of true fraternal life, and when there are no prospects for growth in apostolic life and activity, or for establishment of the Order.

- 48.** Moreover, in several regions there are *groups of friars* which, while not being delegations in the proper sense, do, in fact, live outside their own province and within the territory of other

provinces or vice-provinces, without depending upon the Superiors of these latter. Their distance from their own Superiors and confreres and their non-dependence on the Superiors of the region deprives these brothers of many benefits of fraternal life. It seems appropriate that these situations should also be considered by the General Superiors, and a solution found.

Priorities and missionary commitments

49. After a critical examination of the real situations, priority should be given to existing missionary commitments. However, this should not be done in such a way as to hinder the possibility of taking up new commitments in other places, especially for the sake of “implanting” the Order.

CONCLUSION

50. At the conclusion of this work we offer our gratitude and prayer to Christ Jesus, Eternal Priest and Missionary of the Father.

It may be that all we have said in this message does not correspond to the reality we live each day. But it does provide us with a vision to keep in mind, a path to tread, and a goal to reach.

We also intend it as an examination of conscience about the work we have achieved, and an act of humility concerning our limitations.

At the same time, it should be seen as an act of confidence in our capacity for renewal and, in accord with the “signs of the times”, as a sign of our readiness to dedicate ourselves totally to the service of Christ and the brethren, of peoples and of the churches in need.

We entrust these projects to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who has given to us the “Son of Man”, and with Him a new hope, of which we are the bearers and evangelizers to the whole human race.

APPENDIX

Some Special Questions

Missionary statistics

Taking into account the new portrayal of the missionary, as presented in the document of this Plenary Council of the Order, it is impossible to have correct statistics of the missionaries.

Terminology

With regard to the terminology hitherto in use, one is free to choose that which is more suited to each country. However, the terms which remain in the Constitutions will have to be understood according to the new context so often explained in this document.

Catholic mission

In postal addresses, we should use terms most appropriate for the purpose, taking account of local sensibilities.

Nomenclature of the missions

If missions are changed into vice-provinces, they should take the name of the place where they are. Where the transition is expected (from mission to vice-province), or in places where it is not possible, the existing name should be kept without modification.

Vicariates, Apostolic Prefectures, Prelacies

In keeping with the reflections made at Mattli concerning our missionary service in the Church, and in conformity with present-day ecclesiology and the practice already followed in other similar situations, the Plenary Council of the Order desires that the General Definitory petition the Holy See to erect into dioceses the vicariates, apostolic prefectures and prelacies still entrusted to the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin in Latin America, taking into account the circumstances of each case.

This request should be made in such a way that it shows our readiness to pass from the role of directors to that of collaborators. It should stress our intention to foster a plurality of presence and the primary responsibility to develop a native clergy.

Reports of Superiors

The Plenary Council recommends that the General Definitory study ways of making the reports, which the mission superiors are bound to make periodically, less frequent and less detailed.

Seraphic Mass Association

Above all, a theological and pastoral revision of the Seraphic Mass Association is recommended, with the aim of making the Association more acceptable and credible to Christians of today.

Obediences

If a mission is changed into a vice-province, the obediences to and from it will be issued by the Minister Provincial or the Minister General, according as the vice-province depends on one or the other, following the norms of the Constitutions n. 79,4.

[cf. ANALECTA 94 (1978) 257-282]