

Reflection on Chapter 10 of the Constitutions: Obedience

David Preuss

“Docile to the Holy Spirit in a fraternal sharing of life, let us search for and fulfill God’s will in every event and action.” #158.6

Francis was inspired by the words and example of Jesus, and he gave himself totally to Christ, who himself intently sought the Father’s will. This is the ultimate expression of Francis’ minority and poverty: his willingness to hand over the power of decision making to his brothers and the church authorities. He doesn’t just piously tell the friars how to do God’s will; no, he humbly listens to everyone. To give one’s self over to the brothers in order to mutually discern questions of how to live and work, is a difficult, even bitter thing to accomplish. Yet, those who are unwilling to suffer for the sake of the kingdom are unworthy of being called followers of Francis or of Christ. Our mutual agreement to seek the common good has to be more than “happy talk”! Integrity demands that we embrace the challenge of obedience.

Letting go of a 21 year assignment was a challenge that took me through much depression and suffering. It took me years to recover from the loss of a ministry where I was much loved, and successful; and it was difficult going into one that was not nearly as personally satisfying. There is nothing like a provincial transfer to take Biblical and constitutional ideals and thrust them into the arena of spiritual-psychological wrestling. Brothers, it pays to elect leadership that has a degree of success in accomplishing the challenges of Article I: The Pastoral Service of the ministers and guardians. Once we have placed that challenge into their hands, then we are called to do our part to respond to our half of the bargain: the Loving Obedience of the Brothers. Six and a half years after my personal lesson on the cost obedience, I can see how a vision larger than my own perspective has served the people of God and the Capuchin fraternity well. The “Seiren call” of comfort and personal preference pervades our American culture; the challenge of being “counter cultural” seems romantic until the provincial calls to check on whether our proclamations about desiring God’s will are real or not real.