Rome, September 21, 2015

Letter to the brothers of the Order of Preachers

From the « Propositum » of the Order to the conventual project of apostolic life

« The purpose (propositum) of the Order was described as follows by Pope Honorius III in a letter to St Dominic... » (LCO 1, § I).

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My dear brothers,

It is in the perspective of this «propositum» of the Order that I address to you this letter devoted to the «community project», thus responding to the request of the general chapter of Trogir (ACG Trogir 2013, 69). I propose to highlight how the work of each community in elaborating its «program or project of apostolic life» (LCO 311, § II) actually opens a path on which each brother and each community is engaged in the unending process of «confirmation» of the Order through the deployment of its fundamental «propositum» (LCO 1, § I ; § VIII).

By stating that: «The Order’s nature as a religious society derives from its mission and its fraternal communion» (LCO 1, § VI), the Fundamental Constitution clearly establishes the link between mission and community that defines our Order. In doing so, it refers to one of the essential tasks of the conventual chapter: to examine at the same time the fidelity of brothers to the apostolic mission and to the regular life (LCO 7 § II). In fact, a reflection on the conventual project of apostolic life is also an invitation to consider the responsibility of the chapter in the dynamics of the «holy preaching».

Conventual apostolic project and Propositum of the Order

It was the General Chapter of Oakland that introduced the term «community project» and since then the chapters of the Order have expressed themselves several times on this theme.

Certainly, we can note that the chapter intended to face the difficulties encountered, here or there, in ensuring that the life of a community is not reduced simply to a juxtaposition of individual activities carried out without any link with the community (cf ACG Oakland, 1989, 38). In this way also it clearly highlighted the risk of «excessive individualism» in communities (moreover, in this respect, it is useful to underline that this trend did not emerge only with the arrival of the «new generations», even if we can recognize among them a specific form of relation of the individual to the group, as well as a specific process of recognition and identification of personal journeys within a collective history). But, over and above that reason, talk of the community project seeks also to promote apostolic work in common (ACG Caleruega 1995, 44). That is why the chapter of Bogotà affirms that the community project is an instrument for making positive the tension between fraternal life and mission (Mexico City 39 ; Caleruega 44 ; Bologna 127-132), in order to ensure that it is the whole community that preaches and bears witness (LCO 311 §II). This project « is an instrument for deepening our relationships, strengthening sincere communication and the commitment of all to the mission » (ACG Bogotà 2007, 164). It is in this way that the conventual communities become «houses of preaching » (ACG Krakow 2004, 219-226). The call to develop the apostolic plan of a community is a call to implement the capitular modality of fraternal communion and to find in it one of the key sources of the mission of preaching.
A debated expression

Many of the brothers nonetheless, in all parts of the world, express perplexity as to the relevance of this notion of community project. In the first place these are objections in the linguistic order because, depending on language and culture, to speak of a «project» may indicate realities as diverse as a program of concrete objectives to be attained, an overall plan of life, or even an ideological project. Some fear also a univocal definition of the activity that must absolutely be accepted and implemented by all who want to belong to a community and engage in it. Others will argue that the «common project» in the Order is already clearly established by the Constitutions and the Acts of the general and provincial chapters and that it is not necessary to add more. Others express the fear that such a «common» project might suffocate individual creativity, or neglect the value of subsidiarity (since it is to be approved by the prior provincial). It is therefore important to avoid what the brothers fear, that it would impede the proper deployment of the vocation of the Order.

However, beyond these perplexities and objections, it is important to realize that precisely with this concept, successive general Chapters wanted to call the brothers to bind themselves to what is the very heart of the vocation of Order: to offer to the Church and to the world «houses of preaching» where brothers learn to «remain in the Word» in order to «become disciples» (cf. Jn 8, 31-32; Jn 14, 23; Mt 11, 29). In preparing the project of the community, and in evaluating it regularly, the conventual chapter assumes its proper responsibility of governing the «holy preaching». In doing so, it expresses a conviction (perhaps this is what gave rise to the fact that the chapter of Trogir, noting the perplexity of some about the use of this concept, asked the Master of the Order to write a letter on this matter): the concrete realization of fraternal communion is an integral part of the preaching of the Order. And this belief challenges us: how can the brothers subsume an undeniable tendency to individualism - or rather, I think, to a privatization of preaching - in a common aspiration to receive their vocation again and again from the «fraternal communion of preachers» to which they are assigned? The issue is the esteem that each one has for the «crucible of community life» as the source of the ministry of preaching, by recognizing it as the source of his own personal life, human, Christian, spiritual, religious, apostolic and Dominican. We can therefore actually speak of a «project of fraternity» of a fraternity in which each one wishes to be engendered anew every day, a fraternal life that is in itself a «preaching» of the promise of communion. A fraternal life that will be a sign in the world, to the extent that it is preaching for its members. Fraternal communion and mission!

A «project» to confirm the «Propositum» of Dominic

The word Proposito is the one with which the Fundamental Constitution of the Order begins (LCO 1, § 1) and the different translations give us an orientation to clarify what is at stake in the «community project». «Propositum Ordinis his expressis verbis Honorius papa III s. Dominico et fratibus eius scribens ». The English translation begins like this: «The Order's purpose was described as follows by Pope Honorius III in a letter to St Dominic and his brothers: 'He who never ceases to make his church fruitful through new offspring wishes to make these modern times the equal of former days and to spread the Catholic faith. So he inspired you with a holy desire to embrace poverty, profess the regular life and commit yourselves to the proclamation of the Word of God, preaching everywhere the name of our Lord Jesus Christ» [Bull of 18 January 1221]. This first word is translated in Spanish by «el ideal de la Orden» (the ideal), and in French by «le projet de l'Ordre» (project, purpose). So the Propositum of Dominic is the project of the Order, its ideal aim, its finality. How can we help to ensure that the program or project of apostolic life (programma seu schema vitae apostolicae; programma o proyecto; programme ou projet) of a community is the interpretation, for a particular time and place, of the propositum of the beginnings? This, it seems to me, is the challenge given to us: establish a project for a «holy preaching».

The scope of the preparation by a community of its apostolic project goes well beyond the mere enumeration of activities planned by each of the brothers or proposed more collectively by all or by a group of brothers of the community. Such an enumeration would only constitute the formal content of the «program» mentioned by LCO 311. It is not about producing a «strategic plan» for effective
preaching which would seek to adapt to the needs or constraints of a market. The challenge is to include this program within a dynamic that goes beyond it and carries it on: the dynamics by which a community of friar preachers aims to become a concrete realisation of a «holy preaching» of the Order of Preachers. This holy preaching is indeed the project, the aim and the purpose of the Order that Dominic asked the Pope kindly to confirm. The modality of the tension towards such an ideal is that of the process by which each individual is involved in the future of a community, which is committed to the future of a province and of the Order, which are themselves seeking to be like «small churches» at the heart of the Church, thus remembering that the Church has been gradually established in the world as a communion to which the preaching of Jesus constantly adds new believers. When reading the Gospel, it is clear that it is by entering this movement that each new believer gradually understands himself (herself) promised to the salvation preached by Jesus. But we also see that this first community of «friends of Jesus», discovered themselves as a prefiguration of this communion which is proclaimed, gripped in their turn by the urgency of going through towns and village, preaching the good news of the Kingdom. It is this dynamic that lives in the «propositum» of Dominic: to be at the heart of the Church an evangelical memory of the preaching of Jesus in which the Church is established. Such is the adventure of holy preaching by which our modern times can be conformed to those of former days through «Him who never ceases to make his church fruitful through new offspring» (LCO 1 § 1).

Thus, when it elaborates its project of apostolic life, a community enters into the adventure of a story by which a community builds itself with its own words, that is to say it becomes a house of preaching by recalling to itself its being rooted in the evangelical preaching. This is the reason why I like to borrow from Paul Ricoeur the notion of narrative identity to describe what is at play in the development of the apostolic project of communities. Narrative identity, writes Paul Ricoeur, is «the kind of identity to which a human being attains through the mediation of the narrative function». For him, the constitution of narrative identity, of an individual person or of a historical community, is the place where history and «fiction» are formed together. In light of this concept, we can say that, faced with the risk of fragmentation in dispersed identities or in indifference, the challenge is to include the life of our communities within the «living memory» of the origins (of Jesus, the first preacher, and of Dominic), thereby responding to the call for a continuous renewal. In this way we can understand that the unity of the preaching of the Order, of a province or of a community, does not refer to univocity or uniformity, but rather to the unity of the ideal towards which the proclamation of the Kingdom has tended since evangelical times and which Dominic sought to realise in his time: this eschatological communion to which the evangelization in the world of the name of Jesus Christ wants to add new believers. In this sense, fraternal communion, always inchoate, which is built by the development of the apostolic project of the community, is a sign of this communion that is preached. Far from remaining frozen in a pointless desire for an identity that would always be the same (idem), the community becomes itself (ipse) by projecting itself in this designation of the Kingdom that is coming. In a certain way, the adventure of such a story is what allows a community to receive itself constantly as «consecrated» to the Word that comes, to the event of mercy. A «community in project», a sacrament as it were of the design of the One who sent his Son for the salvation of the world.

The chapter, at heart

By clearly giving to the conventual chapter the elaboration of the community program or project, the Constitutions underline that the chapter is at the heart of this process of constructing the narrative identity of the communities of preachers and of each of the brothers who are its members: «In order that the common life may be at the service of the apostolate and be enriched by the work of the brothers, every convent should develop its own program or project of apostolic life. The program, having been prepared and reviewed by all, must be approved by the prior provincial. In this way individual activity which is not permitted by the community nor by the prior provincial will be eliminated» (LCO 311, § II). What is at stake in this undertaking?
From the outset, the chapter of Oakland (ACG Oakland, 38) shows how the apostolic community plan demonstrates how community life must be regarded as fully integrated in the overall mission of preaching. The development of this «life project» allows, not a resolution of the inevitable tension between community and mission (ACG Mexico City, 36, 1.2.1), but to go beyond it by showing that they mutually reinforce each other. This tension echoes ancient dialectics in the religious life: between contemplative life and active life, between missionary action and the internal life of a community, between community reality and the reality of the world, or even between religious life and secular life. These tensions took on fresh weight starting from the larger movement of post-conciliar aggiornamento, when the Order’s form of regular life found itself becoming less «monastic» and then the distinction between «conventual» life and «apostolic» life was erased, while at the same time the ways of living found in the convents of the Order became much more diversified. More widely, in the Church, the emphasis placed on works of mission may have led to privileging the value of «doing», sometimes to establish an illusory opposition between doing and being, leading to forgetting that the choice of religious life was perhaps best defined as the choice of a «way of life» where, for the friar preacher, it is a case of learning how to become, with and through his brothers, an «evangelical man» and at the same time an «apostolic man», as Vicaire described St Dominic. In this sense, the community project is not simply a list of each one’s apostolic activities, but rather indicates the dynamics by which a given community seeks to deploy its own «way of life of a preacher» in a project of life that holds together communion and mission.

By means of the community project developed by the conventual chapter, this integrating dynamic of fraternal communion and mission is implemented, integrating each one to his full and proper measure, but also keeping the objective of the common mission (or apostolic responsibility) free of the subjectivism of each one. The chapters insist that together the brothers take the time and trouble to inscribe in this project all that concerns the concrete life of the community (cf ACG Krakow 2004, 224, 244), the organization of its life of faith and of celebration, the structuring of its rhythms and spaces, the relationship of each brother to the community, and community practices, according to the regular observances in the Order (LCO 40; ACG Mexico City, 39). They invite the friar preachers to value community life as both a source and a fruit of the ministry of preaching, by recognizing in it the source of their own personal life, human, Christian, spiritual, religious and apostolic. Is it not this reciprocity that makes communities of preachers to be signs of fraternity, preachers of communion?

Here we find the dynamics of the narrative identity by which the brothers, the communities and the provinces are integrated in the «propositum» of Dominic. We are not once and for all «established» in a Dominican identity, which would be defined by values, ways of doing, elements of the history of the tradition of the Order of which we would have full control. It is rather this integration with others – under the gaze of others, and with their discernment – which ultimately constitutes our personal and community lives as «preachers», constantly placing the community and the mission in dialogue. It is our integration in Dominican communion «sent to preach» which gives us our own autonomy as preachers, because it directs our apostolic freedom to the project of Dominic, so strongly marked by the desire to preach, through communion, unity. In professing obedience to Dominic, we promise to be faithful to his spirit and project (LCO 189, § IV), which means vowing to take part in this fraternal communion of preaching that he has established, in the name of this same desire to «do be sent to preach». This dynamic evokes the construction of the Church itself, and preaching a fraternal communion constitutes the specific contribution of the Order to that function of «evangelical memory» which consecrated life is in the Church.

So our project will undoubtedly be communitarian, not only because it is developed and evaluated regularly by the chapter of the community, but mainly because, as a fruit of the chapter’s dialogue, it «makes» the community by «speaking» it, that is by formulating the objectives and concrete commitments through which they want to be active heirs of the tradition of the Order. By «speaking» the community (its reality, its commitments in its own context, its objectives and apostolic achievements, its rhythms and the organization of the community’s times for meeting, its apostolic program), it says that this community wishes to integrate continually life and mission to become in
truth what it promises to be: a community of learning, a meeting place, a place of celebration, and, therefore, a house of preaching (ACG Krakow 2004, 225). A community that cannot be reduced to a simple «practical reality» (albeit the practical reality of a confrontation with the requirement of the «virtues» of living together, or of a «base» giving everyone the means for his personal preaching), but which is above all the place where our profession of obedience is aligned with the mystery of the grace of the Word that inhabited St Dominic. Thus, each friar preacher will play his part in the constitution of the Order in the unity of a communion of preaching. In this way is outlined the process by which the brothers «confirm» in adopting it the Propositum of Dominic. The community project is thus the «story» which expresses how a community and its members develop their identity as preachers.

From this work on the narrative identity of a community of preachers, it is worth emphasizing two challenges. One is to keep listening to the conversation of God with human beings, and therefore resolutely to listen to the Word of God, preached as well as heard, celebrated and studied together. In fact, it is this «centring» on the Word that can lead our communities to live truly the mystery of a fraternal communion in a relentless pursuit of the truth ((your word is truth), John 17:17) that sets free: «It is by sharing the life of the One who, sent by the Father, breathes out his Spirit upon us, we acquire the inner freedom that alone makes us attentive to the appeals of our brothers and sisters» (ACG Trogir 2013, 40). The life of the communities seeks therefore to help everyone to adopt this style of life which «flows from this personal and communal balancing of study, contemplation, and liturgical prayer, each element enlivening the others» (ACG Trogir 2013, 45). Doing this is already evangelization: «The pleasure of our fraternal life, and the joy and the forgiveness that we share with one another will constitute our best evangelization in this world wracked with violence, conflict and intolerance. Weren’t our first communities called “the holy preaching”?» (ACG Trogir 2013, 45).

Houses of preaching where the brothers learn to «remain in the Word» in order to «become disciples» (cf. Jn 8, 31-32; Jn 14, 23; Mt 11, 29). But it is also the challenge of conversation between the brothers. This is one of the most difficult discoveries one can make in the course of the visits in the Order: that sometimes the brothers say to visitors that «in this community, we do not talk to each other» (except for football, politics, about others, or sometimes about bishops!). However, everyone aspires to a quality of conversation which establishes the fabric of humanity without which no fraternal and spiritual life, nor any shared apostolic responsibility, or the possibility of a joint project, can be imagined. To undertake a joint project: it is talking about all of this that makes us to live, that is to take the chance of a genuine conversation where each person engages his own word, without fear and without calculating, so as to take his part in the common discernment of the orientations to be taken for the best possible synergy between life and mission … The apostolic project of a community is developed at the intersection of these two conversations – with God and with the brothers – so that the common apostolic responsibility (cf. ACG Bologna 1998, 127.3) finds its source in a common «concern for the world», «love of the world», the same «insomnia for the salvation of the world» which characterized Dominic, the preacher of mercy.

A community «in project»: mission and itinerary

How can the project of apostolic life of a community be the interpretation and updating, in a specific time and place, of the original Propositum? According to the previous remarks, the answer to this question may consider several points of view: that of the orientations given to preaching, that of the conditions realised in the community to promote this preaching, that of the common apostolic responsibility to which each of the brothers is ordered by the profession of his vow of obedience. It is in fact this profession that integrates us into the movement of the primary mission of the Son, and opens the path on which to become disciples of Jesus, the preacher. «The contemplative life is, absolutely speaking, more perfect than the active life, because the latter is taken up with bodily actions: yet that form of active life in which a man, by preaching and teaching, delivers to others the fruits of his contemplation, is more than the life that stops at contemplation, because such a life is built on an abundance of contemplation, and consequently such was the life chosen by Christ … And thus it was fitting that he should give men confidence in approaching him by associating familiarly with them» (ST III, q 40, a 1, sol 2 and resp 3).
But the very process of the conventual apostolic project – like the apostolic plan of a province, or the mission given to the institutions placed under the direct jurisdiction of the master of the Order – invites us to strengthen awareness of a common apostolic responsibility by a regular work of evaluation. It is thanks to such a work of evaluation that it is possible, not only to correct any errors and to adapt the response to the needs, but also to identify the changes in context and the new challenges of evangelization, as well as the new needs which could be met, for its part, by the testimony of apostolic preaching. It is on the basis of this work that we are called to have the courage to change, to abandon places or works in order to join others, to take new initiatives. Evaluation, adaptation and mobility, indicate the real and demanding perspective of the itinerary of preachers.

Landmarks for itinerancy

In view of the mission that is its purpose, the Order seeks to promote the apostolic creativity of each brother and of each community. It is not only – although it is important – to recognise and to evaluate the capacity of each to preach, but above all to promote the integration of each one in the common effort to adjust continuously the contribution of the Order to the «story of the proclamation of the Kingdom that comes».

The priorities that have been defined for the Order (ACG 1978, Quezon City, 15, §5) and clarified through the general chapters are all guides to discerning the most appropriate orientations for the context and needs of a time and of a place. They refer somehow to the horizon of the ideal of the preaching that constitutes the Propositum of Dominic. If, during the last few centuries, we thought that the world was predominantly Christian and that in a certain way the preaching of the Gospel could be undertaken in a pastoral way, the urgency today is to propose the Word in de-Christianised cultures and worlds. This reality urges us to develop a cultural policy (a «study mission») oriented towards philosophical and theological research on the cultures, social movements, and religious traditions outside of historic Christianity. The presence of brothers and sisters of the Order teaches us that today the world develops according to a logic where more and more people do not have a say in the organization of the world, which they must nevertheless accept as not offering them unconditional hospitality and not asking them to be genuine agents. Therefore, the first concern for justice in the world is the desire to contribute, because of the communion that is the subject of preaching, to introducing more and more the conditions of justice in the world for greater respect for the dignity of each human person and group. The new means of social communication establish new types of relations and social networks, building a «new continent» that must as a priority be integrated in the preaching of the Word of God.

Since the chapter of Rome, a certain number of apostolic fields have been identified in which our preaching further unfolds (what were called, in Trogir, «mission mandates»): schools of preaching, presence to groups of immigrants, pastoral care in the indigenous worlds, interreligious dialogue, pastoral care in the centres of large cities, preaching the rosary and pastoral care in popular devotions, parish ministry, the world of education, preaching in the world of the new digital social networks and the Internet, the pastoral care of young people, and the Salamanca process. These fields do not seek to designate «new places of preaching», but rather to invite the brothers and sisters of the Order to develop the renewal of evangelization beginning from their commitments in these areas. Dominic wanted to preach «at the heart of the Church» and in the world. The challenge for us today is to try and stay in those places where the Church is experiencing the profound changes that are transforming societies, social equilibrium, the relation of religious beliefs with the sciences, the construction of societies, and the habitation of the world. In this respect, the above-mentioned priorities may constitute landmarks for such a development.

But how are we to discern the orientations to give to such a development? Here again, the reflection of the Order in its general chapters can guide discernment since it identified the «frontiers» on which the Order is invited to be, both to contribute as preachers to the care of human and social wounds caused by the fractures in the world, and to participate in the construction of bridges that would make these borders to be not places of division but opportunities to pass through to communion. Remember the frontiers that were identified (ACG 1986, Avila, 22): the frontiers between life and death, the challenge of justice and peace in the world; the frontiers between human and inhuman, the
challenge of the marginalized; the frontiers of Christian experience, the challenge of universalist religions; the frontiers of religious experience, the challenge of secular ideologies; the frontiers of the Church, the challenge of non-Catholic confessions and other religious movements. Certainly, because the definition of priorities as frontiers now seems already old, we might be tempted to regard them as out of date. The experience of the visits to the provinces have made me think rather that they still have their full value, both for the evaluation of our current preaching and for the orientations that we could give it and that would inscribe it further within the perspective of the *Propositum* of the foundation of the Order.

A community allowing itself to be expropriated and to recover its mobility

The capacity for expropriation is, said Benedict XVI, the essential spiritual requirement of evangelization. It seems to me that, in the Order, our belonging to a community, and our participation in its life and mission, are two ways by which each of us can learn to allow himself to be expropriated of himself and of «his» preaching. The elaboration in chapter of the apostolic plan of a community is certainly one of the most suitable means to encourage us in this direction and thus to strengthen the role in «government» of the conventual chapter. It witnesses to our confidence in humanity’s capacity for fraternal communion. There are two reasons for this. We have already emphasised above the challenge of dialogue and conversation between the brothers within the communities, and the fundamental place given to the Word of life in this conversation. Making a common project, means speaking together of what makes us live, of what we are concerned about in the world within which we preach and of what we understand of the logics that are at work in it, of our concern for the salvation of humanity, of our study, of our dialogues with non-believers... Speaking to consecrated persons in the Church, Pope Francis wrote that he expected them to be attentive to what God and the world wants. On the one hand, it means taking time regularly for such conversations (and so often we say we are tired of meetings), but, on the other hand, also taking the chance of mutual trust, of respect for the word of each one without reducing anyone to the momentary expression of his thoughts, of the generous determination of everyone to take part in a «conversation» which will be more interested in the possible unanimity between all than in the confrontation of ideological identities. Thus, and this is the second reason mentioned above, the chapter conversation between the brothers should be not only the opportunity for the development of a project, but also an opportunity given to each brother to engage fully, without fear or reserve, in a common responsibility, abandoning any temptation to «privatise» his vocation as a preacher, to «possess» an apostolate or an institution, to participate in the common life more under the mode of lobbying than of a solidarity by which each one wants to remain vulnerable to the needs and calls of all. How often our apostolic life risks being paralysed because of individual attachment to projects!

The conversation and the lives of brothers in community will also be an opportunity for them to define together again the balance of the common «Dominican ecology» they want to promote and establish. A holy preaching can indeed be described as a «tree of preaching» which, at the heart of the Church, wants to contribute to the existence of the tree in which all find their nest. But it must also take care of what constitutes its roots, and establish the conditions for a certain balance of the Dominican life of a fraternal communion: the fraternal life, prayer, and study, three ways of contemplating and of searching for the truth that He is. It is because of this that, in the elaboration of the project of a community, it will be important to clarify together the practical ways in which the community will assume the requirements of the regular life according to the constitutions of the Order, its observances (of which study is one of the main ones), the objective reference of all to the same rule so that the common mission is always protected from the arbitrariness of individual subjectivities. Very often it is on the occasion of this elaboration that a community reiterates to itself the value it wants to give to practices which constitute the «way of living» which, in the Order, support our desire to follow Christ and strengthen our apostolic determination: austerity and sobriety of life, unconditional sharing of goods, perseverance in prayer, silence, dedication to study ... Thus the project of the community will be a dynamic of fraternal life where the heart and the reason mutually watch over each other, as justice and mercy will be mutual guardians of each other.
The community is also a place where we can formulate how we would like to expropriate ourselves of a certain «worldliness». It is also the case that the community dialogue will allow us to assess the way in which, sometimes, short-term economic criteria burden our apostolic choices, or prevent us knowing how to take the risk of change, of innovation, including having the courage to risk failure. It is also the extent of our «sense of belonging» to our community that will make it easier for us to make a clear assessment of the ways in which we are marked like all our contemporaries by some of the logics of «post-modernity»: the relation of the identity of persons to their communitarian belonging; the crisis of confidence in regard to institutions and in this context the fragility of the workings of democracy; a certain «crisis» of believing together which marks all religious confessions today; the very modern risk of reducing every evaluation to a problem-solving approach rather than engaging in profound processes of renewal. Some have described as one of the features of «post modernity» the fact that it was the era of pragmatism and of value given to the effectiveness of reasoned action. In this perspective, the evaluation of the results of action is more and more highlighted. This concerns us as well and we should make steps to evaluate the community projects that we formulate. However, in consideration of what has been said up to now, it is important not to make a mistake about the objective: the evaluation focuses not only on the efficiency of pragmatic action but on the fruitfulness the project might have had in strengthening the evangelical and apostolic dynamics of a community. For this reason, it can truly be said that the evaluation is for the prior an instrument in animating the community (cf. ACG Caleruega 1995, 44; ACG Krakow 2004, 244; ACG Rome 2010, 68-69), as it is also for the prior provincial (cf. for example: ACG Mexico City 1992, 40; ACG Providence 2001, 275) during his visits, which are «a means of reflection and animation of the apostolic and community life» (ACG Oakland 1989, 24). The fact of periodically evaluating the community project enables us to stress the involvement of everyone in the common apostolic responsibility, thus to promote the role of each one, as also to fight the excessive individualism that can always (re-)emerge (on this point cf ACG Mexico City 1992, 36, 2.2.6). The chapter of Rome proposed some criteria for carrying out this evaluation (ACG Rome 2010, 62, 63-67).

A method of evaluation for itinerant preaching?

There is probably not a single «method» for the development of a community project, although some steps are essential. It is up to each province, during a provincial assembly or chapter (opportunities for a provincial «conversation») to formulate the main lines of the apostolic project of the province, the specific objectives of the province’s plan for «life and mission» which will be the reference point for the elaboration of the projects of the communities.

If one considers the community project as the development of our profession of «apostolic obedience», the evaluation should cover not only the objectives that will be set by the community, but also the integration of the community project in the more global project of the province from which a community receives its mission (planning of the province, LCO 107), or of the Order (cf. ACG Caleruega 1995, 44). This is in fact the subject of a number in the Constitutions indicating that the project must be submitted to the prior provincial (LCO 311 §II). Also, it will be very fruitful to evaluate how, through our community projects, we imagine our collaborations for the same mission within the Dominican family.

Because of this same profession of obedience, it will also be very useful to evaluate the obstacles that we would identify in the achievement of a community project, and which often constitute a weight for the responsibility for a common preaching: individualism, the temptation to federalism, personalisation of apostolic engagements, the temptations for the founders of groups and the risk of fragmentation, a juxtaposition of preachers which can, again, lead to a personalized fragmentation, the temptation of identitarian recognition, the instrumentalisation of the community (that is to say, in the end, of its members) for the benefit of personal projects. But there is also the temptation of immobility which can have several causes: not taking into account changes in the context, nor changes in social structuring or in the Church and its relation with the world, not taking seriously the defamiliarization of the Church and of our contemporaries; not considering the reality of real resources, demographic, for example, which require some changes, neglecting the permanent formation that would allow us to respond to new needs or calls, and preferring merely to stick to
repeating what we have always done ... And, because apostolic obedience is entirely mobilized by «insomnia for the salvation of the world», an essential reference point for this evaluation is the rigorous consideration of changes and needs in the world (ACG Caleruega 1995, 44).

We said that the conventual apostolic project is not a strategic plan. It is, more ordinarily, but perhaps in a more demanding way, the fruit of the conversation of brothers which must be at the centre of the life of our communities. Its process of elaboration must remain simply that of a conventual chapter, or of a community meeting, where the conversation of the brothers will allow time for them to share information on everyone's current activities, to discuss common perspectives of the world's concern in this specific place and time, to evaluate the adjustment of the current preaching to the priorities that the conversation will highlight, to define the objectives for the coming year and, finally, to formulate the community apostolic project and the way in which we will weave together fraternal life and mission. Fundamentally, it is to pursue, to recover, or to form the habit of celebrating our chapters, as we celebrate the confirmation of our vocation. The installation of our commitments and sometimes of our apostolic and pastoral institutions, has too often led us to consider that the chapters could be reduced to being moments of pragmatic organisation of the management of what is already in place. The chapters should rather be moments where the brothers, by their fraternal conversation, become vulnerable to the concern of the world and the needs of people. Vulnerable, also, to the requirement of the Word to be welcomed, shared, proclaimed, and always carried forward, there where He precedes us, in the desire to contribute to the continuing extension of the communion of his Church. And it is to the extent to which we are capable of «consolidating» also in our «itinerant» vocation, that we will be more capable, with the entire Dominican family, of confirming our Order as an Order of Preachers, where the «holy preaching» (cf Lateran IV) is the project, the ideal, and the purpose.

Conclusion: an Order in foundation ...

In concluding this letter, I hope keenly that it will be studied and discussed in the communities during a chapter. Starting from there, each community will be able – according to the provisions that the prior provincial will determine – to develop its community project. The next visits to the provinces, where the main focus will be on the renewal of preaching and on permanent formation, will be an opportunity to pursue this reflection.

The celebration of the Jubilee of the Order will remember the confirmation by the Pope of the intuition of Dominic that he could serve the Church by an Order of Preachers. This recognition was then expressed by the many Bulls which recommended the brothers of this completely new Order to the local Churches. But, in a sense, we must say that this constitutes only the first dimension of the confirmation of the Order, which needs to be completed by the confirmation that the brothers themselves, day after day, will bring to this intuition, that the Preachers wish to engage, in the image of the first community of Jesus, in a life that is evangelical and apostolic. The community project is therefore the modality that the Order proposes to support us in this effort of «confirmation» of our Order. As the fundamental constitution expresses it: «The Order's fundamental purpose and the way of life which follows from it retain their worth in every age of the Church's existence. However, as our tradition teaches us, it is of the greatest importance that in times of accelerating change and development they be understood and given due weight. In such circumstances it is for the Order to renew itself and adapt itself courageously, discerning and testing the elements which are good and useful in humanity's aspirations, taking them into the unchangeable equilibrium of the fundamental elements of its life» (LCO 1, § VIII).

The community project, in this sense, calls to our vow of obedience by which everyone is committed, with the brothers who receive it and who will in turn be received, to found the «holy preaching» at the service of the Church: «The Community project is one of the important places where we can put into practice the vow of obedience which establishes our personal responsibility with respect to the building of community as well as to the mission of the Order» (ACG Caleruega, 1995,
Engaged in this «dynamic of foundation», the Order of St Dominic may be defined as «evangelical memory», in the Church, that the Church is constituted by preaching as the «sacrament» of the loving conversation of God with humanity. In communion with you, I ask the Lord to give us every day the grace to serve thereby the Church and the world.

With my fraternal friendship,

Your brother,

fr. Bruno Cadóré, O.P.
Master of the Order of Preachers
... We can also read, in the Acts of the chapter of Providence (ACG Providence 2001, 272-273): «But the question that concerns us is not whether or not there should be a community project. The question is whether we wish to live a fraternal community life which must be apparent in our mission and in the application of all elements of Dominican life, or whether we wish to live an individualistic life» (273, 2) and further on: «Following the course of our more genuine democratic tradition, our constitutions endow us with adequate means for our great objective: fraternal life in all its dimensions » (273, 3).

Ricœur, P., *Temps et récit III*. Here history and fiction do not oppose historical reality and the imaginary, but rather designate how the story of an existing thing combines the history on which the narrator depends and his way of projecting himself into the future.

In this respect, we can recall how the chapter of Trogir defined the apostolic determination which must inhabit us: to join our contemporaries in the concrete reality of their existence, in order to share with them a word of hope and friendship. For this, the chapter emphasised three essential aspects of the preaching of the Order: compassion for those who suffer, who are excluded or whose dignity is not recognized or promoted; dialogue that seeks the truth humbly and with others (in particular to struggle against identitarian phenomena and the consequences of fundamentalisms); to bring a word of hope and life opening for people the horizon of freedom. In doing so, the chapter of Trogir inserted itself in a continuity of definition by previous chapters of the «priorities» for the preaching of the Order, and of the «frontiers» which are important points of view for evaluating what we are currently doing, and what we are considering for the future. These criteria are at the basis of the identification, by the chapter of Rome, of the main fields on which to focus the deployment of the Order’s preaching (ACG Rome 2010, 128 - 184). The preaching of the Word makes our communities to be witnesses of the friendship of God, whether in the most typical pastoral situations or in more exposed apostolic commitments.

Thus the chapter of Caleruega said: «The community project (Oakland, 38; Mexico, 39) is one of the few processes which allow dialogue within the community to be deepened, and which guide and foster the balance between the community and the individual. It is obvious that this is not just a planning tool, but rather an important element of our living together and of our way of looking at our mission. For an individual, it means becoming part of a group organized in a certain way, about agreeing to attune, indeed even to subordinate, one’s own individual project to the community’s. [...] The community project, precisely because it pre-supposes the active involvement of all the brothers to the extent that their gifts and health allow, can be a useful element in avoiding the formation of pressure groups and the marginalisation of any individual brother. The community project must be based upon the real possibilities of the community, bearing in mind that it must be in tune with the priorities of the Order, with the directives of the provincial chapters, and evidently with the needs and questions of the people of God» (ACG 1995, Caleruega, 44).


Each province determines the method proposed for communities to develop this community project. Here one can only recall, on the basis of the Acts of the chapters mentioned above, the important elements that should be integrated in the process.

A conversation between the brothers must allow the formulation of the essential perspectives of the mission of the community, at this time and in the given context. This will also be an opportunity for the world’s concern to be part of what the brothers are sharing, for us to be taught by various concerns for the world that the brothers carry, because it is true that our preaching must be rooted in compassion and concern for the salvation of the world.
* The brothers will come to an agreement on the main elements of organization of the life of the community: tasks and offices and their description, prayer and celebration, chapters and councils, holidays, community retreat, financial issues. The rhythm and modalities of evaluation should be agreed.

* Each brother will have the opportunity to present his apostolic commitments and ministries, and together the brothers will determine the main lines of the apostolic service of the community. These exchanges must be an occasion for the assessment of the apostolic life of the community on the basis of the commitments of the community, of the apostolic plan of the province, and also of the main priority orientations given by the general chapters.

* In the course of such a dialogue the community constitutes itself in gradually assuming what might be called a "common apostolic responsibility" (cf ACG Bologna 1998, 127, 3), from a common consideration of needs and resources, of gifts and of formation required, in the way a specific community wishes to contribute to the apostolic responsibility of the province.

* The project, on the basis of this discernment conducted in community, will have to specify the methods and order of evaluation, in particular concerning the common apostolic responsibility of the community, integration and service to the local Church, enrolment in the project of the province and in the universal mission of the Order.