



Fratres Ordinis Prædicatorum
CURIA GENERALITIA

Commentary on the annual theme of the Jubilee (2015)
Dominic: Government, Spirituality and Freedom

'If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' (John 8:31-32); 'For freedom Christ set us free' (Gal 5:1)

The truth will set you free! Echoing this promise of Jesus, the image that is forced on me is that of the group that walked with Jesus, announcing the kingdom from town to town. Each one in their own way had been freed. Freed from the weight of their mistakes, the impasses of their lies, the heaviness of their history, from alienating divisions ... driven by the desire of their Master and Lord to go even to other cities, they accompanied him, confident so as to hold themselves, with him, in a Breath that made them day by day more free to be themselves, free to have been given this friendship offered by God with His Son, free to be sent. Free to be disciples of Christ and in turn to invite others to join them. It is the Breath of Jesus' preaching that sets them free, even though they had perhaps not really considered what they had become involved in by responding to his invitation to follow him, or by joining him on their own initiative in appreciation of the mercy which was his grace to them. By staying by his side in his proclamation of the kingdom, they discover that they are becoming even more free than they had ever dared to hope. Free because of the Word of their friend and Lord. 'If you remain in my Word, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free'. Freed by the Word of truth!

It is, I believe, to this freedom of the preacher that this year's theme in preparation for the celebration of the jubilee of the Order refers. Dominic: government, spirituality and freedom. We have in mind some important texts that were proposed to us over the last few decades on these topics (government in the order, obedience, freedom and responsibility...), and which we will be happy to read again. It seems to me that the theme of this year invites us, within the perspective opened by these texts, to focus our attention on what is perhaps the heart of the spirituality of the Order: to receive the audacity of the preacher's freedom in learning to become his disciples. And such is the horizon of government in the Order.

We always emphasize the essential role, unique, given to obedience in the profession of being a preacher: 'I promise obedience, to God ...' Dominic, the historians recall, asked the first brothers to promise him 'obedience and common life'. Two ways to become disciples: listen to the Word and follow his example in living with others, following him as the first community of friends that went with Jesus from town to town to learn from him how to be a preacher. Listen and live together, making this following of the Word the source of unanimity.

Consecrated to preaching: Sent to preach the Gospel

In this year dedicated to the consecrated life, it seems we are invited to draw again, constantly, to this source of our life: to be devoted to the evangelization of God's Word, to be consecrated to the preaching the Word, 'remain in his Word'. 'If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples'. Government for Dominic is to support this desire – of individuals and communities – to be 'truly his disciples'. This means be a guardian of this 'remain in the Word'. There again, it is the criterion of the mission that imposes itself. Indeed, what is this 'Word' ? We learn what that Word means for us starting from the conversation of the Son

with the Father in the breath of the Spirit: 'those you have given me ...', 'that where I am, they also may be with me ...' This filial intimacy in which the mission is ingrained: 'as you sent me, I will also send them ...'. Remaining in the Word does not evoke any 'self-centred contemplative immobility'. Nor does it evoke a 'moral observance' that would establish (or seek) a final 'state of perfection'. Remaining in the Word, in the school of Dominic, means rather to enter into the movement of the Word which comes to humanity to make his home there, and to make us free by the power of his Spirit. It is to stand in the Breath of the Son's mission. It is for us to become disciples, and a community of disciples, proportionate to this friendly and brotherly closeness to the Son. In the words of Thomas Aquinas when he speaks of '*verbum spirans amorem*', one can in effect think that to remain in the Word is to remain in this Word that 'transmits' love, that is to say establishes friendship, brotherhood and communion, in us and amongst us. The Spirit, the Word, of truth and freedom.

One of the first decisions of Dominic, regarded by the history of the Order as one of the most important, was to disperse the brothers of Saint-Romain, so that the grain would not accumulate. In this way he showed that government in the Order would mainly be concerned with preaching. As such, government involves a certain dynamic of spiritual life, which seeks to promote and to serve the freedom of each one and which has its source in the Word of God. As Jesus himself did with the disciples, Dominic sends his brothers in pairs on the roads of preaching. In reality he sends them at the same time to study and to preach, and it is thanks to this determination about dispersal that the Order develops, is established, creates, and welcomes new vocations. This dispersion establishes itinerancy as a method for 'becoming disciples', inviting preachers to allow their lives to be marked by the encounters they will have by going out into the world as 'brothers'. It will also lead them to go to school at the first universities and so to root their search for the truth of the Word in the conversation with the knowledge of their time, root their respect for the human capacity to have knowledge in the study of the mystery of the revelation of God the Creator and Saviour. Remaining in his Word means to stand closer to the conversation of God with humanity which Jesus, first and only master of the preaching of the Kingdom, made visible to the eyes of all.

'God manifested the tenderness and humanity of his Son in his friend Dominic, may he transfigure you in the image ...'. This prayer of blessing for the feast of St Dominic echoes the choice of Pope Saint John Paul II, to place his reflection on the 'Vita consacrata' within the light of the mystery of the Transfiguration (VC 14). In this perspective, and because it has the task of calling, leading and assisting on the journey of 'becoming disciples' so as to become preachers, Dominican government continually seeks to promote the conditions of this 'economy of the transfiguration'. The preaching of the Kingdom is the way the Order proposes to its brothers and sisters for them to be conformed to Christ by the Spirit. Contemplating the icon of the Transfiguration reveals the essential dimensions of this adventure. At the heart of his journey of preaching, Jesus took three of his disciples with him to attend his transfiguration: contemplation of the mystery of the Son is at the heart of the preacher's mission. From this, the preacher receives what it is his mission to transmit: the reality of the Son of God along with the revelation of the economy of the mystery of salvation. Let us remember, in fact, the account of the Transfiguration: 'let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah ...' And Jesus does not take long to answer: a tent will indeed be set up, but it will be at Golgotha in Jerusalem. There will also be two companions, but they will be robbers expelled with him from society and put to death. To the shining light of the mountain of the transfiguration corresponds the lightning that will tear the skies, as if to confirm beforehand the fulfillment of this descent into the abode of the dead from where the Son will be raised, living, overcoming once and for all the darkness of death, and carrying with him in the full presence of the Father those who from this point forward will live with Him forever. On the Mountain of Transfiguration, the disciples finally receive the

mission that will be their joy: to go with Jesus, as far as Jerusalem, where the Word of truth is revealed in fullness. There where the donated life of Christ is the source of our freedom. To be under the sign of the Transfiguration, is to take a path on which our desire to become disciples can grow, remaining in his Word, letting it teach us the obedience and love of the Son revealed on Golgotha and on Easter morning, receiving from his Breath the mission as on the day of Pentecost.

Remain in my word

In his apostolic letter to religious, Pope Francis invites them to 'wake up the world', by knowing how to create 'other places where the evangelical logic of gift, brotherhood, welcoming of diversity, mutual love will flourish'. These places 'must become ever more the leaven of a society inspired by the Gospel, the 'town on the hilltop' which tells the truth and the power of Jesus' words'. These places are our communities, where we can promise to learn to become 'experts in communion' of which the Pope speaks in this same apostolic letter.

It is significant and essential that, in the Order, the superior's function is located precisely at the intersection of these two horizons of our promise: obedience and common life. Dominic wanted 'apostolic obedience' to shape the preachers in becoming brothers of those to whom they were sent in mendicant itinerancy, and in letting themselves be converted and shaped into a brotherhood by leading a community life. This apostolic brotherhood to which we make the vow of obedience is the path proposed by Dominic for fully receiving our freedom. Obedience and common life: two ways to direct attention towards the eschatological communion promised to the world that has been created 'capable', as we say that the world is created 'capable of God'. Two ways to engage, 'usque ad mortem', our freedom in all its fullness. Once again, it is for the superior to call us to take that route of being placed 'under the authority' of the Word, of being the servant of this conversation between God and humanity, that the Word came to fulfill by living amongst men. Obedience and common life, so that preaching is rooted both in the community of disciples who hear the Word of life, and in the community hoping for this eschatological communion announced by the prophet and sealed by the Son with his own life.

What could be a 'tree of preaching', fruit of the promise of evangelical and apostolic life, is rooted in three ways which the tradition of the Order offers us for 'remaining in his Word': brotherly communion, celebration of the Word and prayer, study. It is a specific task of government in the Order - and this is perhaps its primary responsibility - to promote amongst the brothers, and amongst the sisters and the laity, the quality of this triple foundation which guarantees and promotes apostolic freedom.

Brotherly communion is the place where the brothers and sisters can test the ability of human words to serve the search for truth that will set them free. It is through community life that we are to arrive at our freedom by contributing to communion. For this reason, our 'capitular religious life' is essential to our spirituality: each member of the community has his own voice, engaging in the common search for the good of all adapted to the mission of being a servant of the Word, he participates fully in the government of the Order. This is democratic, not because it consists in the designation of the power of the majority, but because it consists rather in the democratic search for unanimity. This exercise of community life is demanding, we know this, because it calls each one never to evade his own participation in the dialogue of this search. It is demanding also, because it requires the expression, in the fullest possible truth, of positions and arguments, even to objectifying disagreements among the brothers, but in the confidence that no one will ever be reduced to an opinion or position expressed, being always in the first place welcomed and loved as a brother. It is demanding, furthermore, because it requires all members of a community, after a patient search to the point that is the closest possible to unanimity, to take their part with

determination in realizing the decision made by all. It is at this price that everyone is then welcome, recognized and supported by all in the momentum of his own generosity and apostolic creativity. Perhaps it is because of the difficulty of this exercise that we abandon far too often this dimension of our remaining in the Word by our community life.

Prayer is a second method of rooting the tree of preaching in the Word. Personal and community prayer cannot be regarded as an exercise to be fulfilled so as to be consistent with the commitment to regular consecrated life. It is the way in which we make the choice, individually and in community, to punctuate the time of our human history through meditation on the mystery of God's history with the world. It is thus to 'own' the history of revelation, in response to this God who comes in His Son to 'own' each one of us. It is about allowing, in prayer, the Spirit to 'blow where he wants'. In this way, prayer comes from listening to the Word and leads back to it, establishing the center of gravity of our personal lives and of the lives of our communities in the contemplation of the mystery of the revelation of which Scripture is the account. The celebration of the Word in the liturgy, its contemplation in meditation on the mysteries of the Rosary, patient silent prayer, help us to locate the consecration of our lives to preaching between contemplation and study, two ways of seeking the truth of His Word of which we want to give the taste to those to whom we are sent. 'If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples'. Remaining thus becomes an opportunity for us, as was the case for the first friends of Jesus preaching, to find ourselves free because raised by His calling, strengthened by His love and mercy, encouraged and sent by his grace to carry forward His Word of truth. Remaining in the Word then leads to us carrying with us, in this silence of listening and waiting, those to whom we are sent, who rely on our prayer, who are given to us by God so that, mysteriously, we accept that He binds their destiny to ours in the same grace of salvation. In this area, government in the Order is a watchman: ensuring that the freedom of individuals and communities is really rooted in the contemplation of this mystery in which the Son himself, in his humanity, gave salvation to the world by adjusting his freedom to that of his Father.

Prayer places us in the school of Our Lady of Preachers. With her, preachers can discover and be constantly amazed by the capacity of human life to be able to become a 'life for God'. With her, singing the Psalms which write their contemplation in the history of revelation, the human words of the preachers are rooted in a friendly understanding of the conversation by which God proposes to humanity its adoption. With her, yet again, the Order establishes at the heart of its preaching the prophetic sign of conversion to brotherly communion, confident announcement of the full realisation of the promise of the alliance in Him who is Truth. At the school of Our Lady of Preachers, this spirituality of obedience in the common life unites the Order intimately to the mystery of the Church, by the shared love of Christ, by adoption in the Breath of His life, by the gift to the world.

Study is the third method for rooting preaching by 'remaining in his Word'. It is the place of research and contemplation of the truth, and it is for this reason that it is a very particular observance in our tradition. Still firmly established in listening to Scripture, and in fidelity to the doctrine and teaching of the Church, study is in the Order the preferred way to maintain our conversation with God, leading also to a friendly and brotherly dialogue with the many systems of thought that mold the world and which search in their own way for truth. By study, the Order invites us to grow continually in freedom, not by enhancing in a worldly way the level of acquired knowledge, but rather by inviting us to move forward on the path of the 'humility of truth'. To engage human intelligence in this adventure that has the audacity to attempt by words and finite human concepts to make the mystery understandable, is both to give thanks to God the Creator who wanted human reason, however finite and limited it is, to be 'capable of God', and also to allow the surpassing of reason in hope of a fullness that no concept can truly grasp. The occurrence of hope reveals the true extent of our freedom.

Government, in the Order, has the responsibility of stopping us abandoning this field of study, and to stimulate our creativity to seek constantly for the most compatible ways of proposing to others this adventure of the evangelization of reason.

Government and spirituality?

This perspective given to the spirituality of the Order - remaining in the Word to know the truth that sets free – allows us to identify certain essential principles of government in the Order. We have already seen that government is essentially directed to the mission of preaching and that it seeks to promote a lifestyle specific to the Dominican tradition which provides brothers with the conditions for rooting their preaching in the Word.

The first principle is to encourage constantly the celebration of the chapters to establish the brothers in a common apostolic responsibility. In his recent apostolic letter, Pope Francis expresses the wish that consecrated persons should ask themselves what it is God and humanity are asking of them. In our tradition, this underlines the renewed importance we must give to the reality of our chapters. Of course chapters - conventual, provincial and general - have the responsibility of making precise decisions about the organization and legislation for our life and our mission. And, as we have highlighted, they are as such privileged moments for placing ourselves humbly in the school of the truth being sought together in brotherhood. Precious reflections of my predecessors have helped us grasp how democracy in the Order was not a method for the exercise of power by the majority, but rather a search for the greatest possible unanimity. If dialogue and debate between the brothers is so important in our tradition, it is so that everyone might participate freely and confidently in a shared articulation of the good of all to which each one will commit himself to contribute. Such a fraternal conversation is possible to the extent that there is fraternal respect, and we demonstrate among ourselves an openness and freedom to express our thoughts.

One of the essential subjects of these debates should be attention to the signs of our time, and understanding the needs and calls that are made to the charism proper to the Order: to carry at the heart of the church the memory of evangelical preaching. In a letter soon to come, I will address - in response to the request of the General Chapter of Trogir - the theme of the community project whose elaboration seems to me to be the focal point of government in the Order. Only to the extent that all have participated in the development of this project can we really assess and direct our service of the Church and the world by preaching. Fraternal communion is built starting from a common concern for the mission, which is not only the determination of what we want to 'do', but also the sharing of our 'compassion for the world' from which we want to share this precious gift of being freed by the Word of truth.

On the basis of this common apostolic responsibility, and because the task of government in the Order is to ensure this rooting in the truth of the Word, the second principle of government is to send to preach. Dominic wanted the response to this 'mission' to be itinerant and mendicant so that the preaching of the Order would extend the economy of the Word, who in Jesus has come into the world as a friend and as a brother, begging hospitality of those he wanted to invite to take part in the conversation with the Father. The 'assignments' given by superiors should always be aimed at this horizon of mendicant itinerancy, for the mission. He spoke, specifically, of apostolic itinerancy, of this 'non-installation' as the way to become a disciple. 'I will follow you wherever you go ...' said one of the disciples, to which Jesus replied, 'foxes have holes, and birds have nests. The Son of Man, however, has nowhere to lay his head ...' It is this statement that Dominic wanted to take seriously, in this way giving his brothers a chance to ask again the question of the Baptist's disciples, 'Lord, where are you staying?' 'Come and you will see ...' This is what should help us to understand the exercise of government in the Order. To understand, and to hear at the heart of our life, the ministries and responsibilities proper to each one: at the heart of the most established realities, perhaps of

successes or brilliant ‘careers’, of the most important functions, a call may resound which asks us to leave in order to rejoin, further on, and more freely, another dimension of the common mission of the Order for the Church. These displacements - painful at times, but so often productive – have characteristics that are constantly recalled in Dominic's life: compassion, frontier between life and death, between the human and the inhuman, the challenge of justice and peace, the need for dialogue between religions and cultures – as many realities as echo the ‘existential boundaries’ of which Pope Francis speaks again in his letter. Mercy for sinners, rather than attachment to our own sins which centres us on ourselves. Service of the communion of the Church and its extension, rather than too great an importance given to identities that reassure us but confine us to ourselves. To remain in the Word, is to stand in the full breeze of the Breath of the mission of the Word itself, of the Word of which we wish to become disciples. The itinerancy of preaching is thus the way to our ‘freedom in order to be free.’

It is because the exercise of government in the Order is directed towards this sending that special attention should be given to each person, to his gifts, his creativity, so that the freedom of each one at the service of the common good and mission will be best deployed. At the heart of this attention, in the name of the common search for the truth of the Word, superiors must have at heart the dual requirement of mercy and justice. Mercy, so dear to our tradition, must give to the care for people its first shape. It is in this way that interpersonal fraternal relations, like the relations within a community, should always be the point of focus that allows us to remind each one that he cannot be reduced to his flaws and failures. Brotherhood really forms when everyone discovers, through it and through the call it constantly gives to let yourself be free in order to be free, his full dignity of being raised and saved by the mercy of Christ. But at the same time, this dignity must always be recognized in its capacity for responsibility. In the perspective of the Word of truth that liberates, there is no individual freedom that justifies being an island, or being the centre of gravity of the life of all the others. Brotherhood, as realized by Christ, teaches us precisely how to receive our true freedom in an openness to reciprocity where the other always counts more than myself. This is why government has the demanding responsibility of keeping together the concern for mercy and the duty of justice. The precise and objective reference to our Constitutions, to the common good, to the decisions of our chapters, allows us to protect the common good of all from the arbitrary claims of individual freedom. The task sometimes seems dry and ungrateful, but it is at the price of this demanding equilibrium that we avoid facile reference to a mercy that is nothing more than cowardice, irresponsibility, or indifference, and that everyone will be able to receive the grace that he came looking for in the Order: to be called to allow yourself to be freed by the Word of truth.

In concluding this commentary on the annual theme of the Jubilee, I would like to mention one last spiritual principle of government in the Order, that of unity and communion. Here again, it is by the criterion of the mission that we can move forward. It is to the extent that we patiently take the means of common deliberation which directs the ministry of preaching that individuals, communities, provinces and all the entities of the Dominican family, enter into the dynamics of integration in a single unity. Each of these is of course invited, summoned, to bring to the common good their own identity, personal, cultural, ecclesial. But because of the common reference to a founding enthusiasm which has consecrated us, all together, to preaching, our desire is to respond together to this sending. Or rather, what is even more demanding, we ask the Spirit to make of us a preaching communion. We make this demand along with the incessant prayer that the Spirit of communion might open in this world the horizon of salvation, establish in our hearts the hope of the new creation. Above the door of the Basilica of Santa Sabina, given to St. Dominic by Pope Honorius III, the mosaic representing the Church of the Circumcision and the Church of the

Gentiles recalls this first horizon of the preaching of the Order: the Word of truth obliges us to serve, through preaching and through witness, the promised communion. This is why we are sent. And on the door of the same basilica, as we know, the representation of the crucifixion recalls that this preaching will lead us to become disciples of Him who, freely, gives his life so that all might be gathered together in unity.

The truth will make you free !

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