



**ORDO PRÆDICATORUM**  
**CURIA GENERALITIA**

**The General Chapter of the Order of Preachers:  
Structure of Communion and Mission**

*In Commemoration of the 8<sup>th</sup> Centenary of the  
First General Chapters of the Order (1220, 1221)*

*Solemnity of the Ascension of the Lord  
Rome, 13 May 2021*

*Prot 50/21/183 Letters to the Order*

*We have decided, the Holy Spirit and us*... (Acts 15:28). This is a remarkable moment in the history of the Church. Faced with division, the Church takes a decision in an unprecedented way. James, leader of the Jerusalem community, pronounced this bold judgment, the first outcome of an arduous communal discernment of a nascent church, together with the apostles Peter and Paul, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Prior to this pivotal moment, the apostles, under the leadership of Peter, cast lots to determine who will take the place of Judas Iscariot. They had clear criteria who to choose: "it is necessary that one who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us, become with us a witness to his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). They prayed for guidance but when the time came to choose between Joseph and Matthias, they resorted to lots. Thus, the decision taken was not a result of an internal process of communal discernment but an impersonal and external act of divination of God's will that is similar to the one used in the Old Testament: "and [Aaron] will cast lots to see which of the two must be of the Lord and which of Azazel" (Lev. 16:8).<sup>2</sup> God remains transcendent and invisible, whose will is made known through an inanimate object, insulated, as it were, from the possibility of human manipulation and error in judgment.

How I wish to be spared from making difficult decisions; if only our constitution allows for "drawing of lots" as a legitimate way for making decisions! But the choice of Matthias is the last drawing of lots that we see in the New Testament. After Pentecost, decision-making radically changed due to the immanent presence of the Holy Spirit who takes an "active role" in the life of church. For this reason, the Acts of the Apostles is called by many biblical scholars as "Acts of the Holy Spirit". In the so-called Council of Jerusalem, James, head of the Jerusalem community, pronounced his judgment: "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials" (Acts 15:28). An important decision is no longer made by an external divination of God's will but by a communal process of intense dialogue and patient discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to determine what is truly good for the community. For the "Spirit of truth who guides into all truth" (John 16:13) now "dwells in them" (1 Cor. 3:16). After Pentecost, the "apostolic manner" for making decisions, "in the presence of the Lord", is communal discernment. Communicating the decision to the communities through a letter, then choosing and sending delegates to

accompany the letter's reception by the communities are integral to the entire process of making and implementing a communal decision (Acts 15:22-32).

St. Dominic celebrated the first General Chapters in 1220 and 1221 on the solemnity of Pentecost. *If the brothers were to embrace the apostolic way of life, then they too must adapt the apostolic way for making decisions for the entire Order.* The communitarian form of government (LCO VI) which Dominic gave to the Order is also a gift to the Church, for the mission of the Order is to help build the Church, the body of Christ.

Chapters - general, provincial, conventual - are *instruments for building communion*. They provide space for confronting challenges the brothers face, for seeking consensus on divisive matters, for discerning the best possible ways to serve the mission of the Order at a particular moment and place, and more importantly, for mutual listening and learning, as brothers.

Ignatius of Antioch, in his letter to the community in Ephesus, says that members of the Church are *σύνδοδοι*, "**companions on the way**", by virtue of the dignity of baptism and their friendship with Christ.<sup>3</sup> We, Dominicans, are also *synodoi*, "itinerant companions", brothers and sisters in-mission-together to preach the Word-incarnate. As we celebrate the culmination of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first general chapters of the Order (1220, 2021) I have requested **Brother Timothy, Fray Carlos and Frère Bruno** to share their thoughts and reflections on their concrete experiences of the General Chapters in the Order, how General Chapters have become instruments of unity and communion, for the sake of the preaching mission of Order. As Masters of the Order, they have been, and continue to be "*synodoi*", companions in the journey of the Order, in its "communal itinerancy". As we read their reflections, we will find common fundamental insights, but the context and content of their experiences would be different, hence, *the same, yet different*.

**Br. Gerard Timoner, OP**



**Br. TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE, OP**

Our form of government embodies the gospel that we are sent to preach. It is an expression of our brotherhood, and before there were brothers, there were sisters. 'Brother' and 'Sister' are the oldest and most fundamental titles in Christianity. They speak of our membership of Christ's family. One of the earliest biographies of St. Dominic is to be found in the *Vitae Fratrum*, 'The lives of the brethren'. It is utterly fitting that the Order of preachers should be founded by someone who claimed to be no more than one of the brethren. This embodiment of brotherhood was vastly appealing to the cities to which we were first sent which in Dominic's time were in turmoil. The old vertical relationships of feudalism were weakening. The culture of deference was on the wane. Merchants were travelling all over Europe and beyond. A mini-globalisation in progress. It was said of the friars that 'the world was their cell and the ocean their cloister.'<sup>4</sup> Their identity as brethren was in itself a preaching of the Gospel in this new world.

Marie-Dominique Chenu OP argued that every time there is a revival of the faith, the word 'brother' resurfaces. 'The typical word of the first Christian communities finds again its full meaning: people are called brother (or sister) in confrontation with social inequalities, and with all the utopic charge of the words. The head of the Dominican team arriving in Paris was still called, in accordance with custom, "Abbot". Within three months, this title was

dropped and he was called, “brother prior”.<sup>5</sup> And so it was right that a recent General Chapter of the Order ordained that the proper title for all the friars of the Order is ‘brother’, as you, our Brother Gerard, gently remind us.

This is especially important at this moment. Our society, as in the time of Dominic, is in a state of turmoil. Old social hierarchies are crumbling. Never before has there been such vast migrations of people searching for peace and security. Every time we leave our homes, we encounter strangers. Zygmunt Bauman has described our society as one of ‘liquid modernity’.<sup>6</sup> Democracy is in retreat. In such an uncertain world, a spirituality of brotherhood offers a way of belonging to people of diverse origins and convictions. Pope Francis constantly summons ordained priests beyond ‘clericalism’. What would an unclericalist Church look like? Dominicans priests should model this in a brotherly ministry.

Why does our brotherhood find expression in General Chapters? I am one of six siblings and we never hold formal meetings at which we propose resolutions and vote. Indeed many of our brethren consider General Chapters to be a waste of time, producing Acts that no one reads! When an English Dominican expressed this objection to Brother Damian Byrne, he replied that holding General Chapters are the breathing of the Order. We would quickly notice the consequence if they were to stop!

Chapters nurture the unity of the Order, which is an expression of our unity in Christ. We listen to each other for days and weeks, because the Holy Spirit is poured on every brother. We seek a consensus which is more than a compromise, but a spacious truth, large enough to win the consent of as many brethren as possible. We take the time so that everyone is heard. God is infinitely patient with us so we should be patient with each other.

I have attended every General Chapter bar one since Oakland in 1989. There have been moments of tension and sharp disagreement, but we have resisted the forces of fragmentation which afflict the Church and society. At Biên Hòa in 2019, we arrived at a deeper peace than before, in which we could even see our differences as invitations to progress further in our understanding of the Gospel.

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of this witness in a Church which is so often torn by divisions between so-called ‘traditionalists’ and ‘progressives’, an opposition which should be alien to the spacious truth of Catholicism. Gathering in chapter is itself a preaching of the Gospel to a world fractured by a growing mutual miscomprehension, fueled by the oversimplified communications of the social media, and a shriveled concern for the truth. General Chapters necessitate years of preparation and weeks of debate and of endless voting. Yet this is the patient organic labour of sustaining a fraternity which is a union of heart and mind.

More boldly, and in the tradition of the English Dominican Province, I believe that one can take a further step and claim that such fraternity open us to friendship with each other. Aquinas taught that we are baptised into friendship with God. I quote Fergus Kerr OP, ‘In charity we are friends with God. There can be no friendship, in the fullest sense, except between equals – but God has made us his equals’.<sup>7</sup> So to the confusing, turbulent world of the city, the first brethren brought the startling offer of equal friendship. Our model of government embodies the friendship of the Order, which is an expression of the friendship which is the life of God.

These early friars and sisters had easy friendships with each other. Dominic delighted in the company of woman and when he was dying Dominic confessed that he preferred talking to

young women to being talked at by old women! His immediate successor, Blessed Jordan of Saxony exchanged the most loving letters with a Dominican nun, Blessed Diana d'Andalo. Meister Eckhart had close friendships with the Rhineland nuns. St Catherine of Siena, a fourteenth century Dominican lay woman, had her community of friends, friars and lay people, called the *caterinati*, who gave each other crazy nicknames and cracked jokes. And there was of course her friendship with Raymond of Capua.

Today relationships between men and women have become fraught with anxiety, with forces of domination and manipulation, of accusation and denial. In some countries young men are becoming nervous of forming relationships with real women, taking refuge in the virtual world where there is no touch. A spirituality of friendship offers a liberating encouragement to dare to relate.



### **Br. CARLOS AZPIROZ COSTA, OP**

#### *General Chapters in the Order's form of government*

I am happy to know that in the midst of so many celebrations, the 800th anniversary of the first two General Chapters, presided over by Saint Dominic, will be remembered. In both of them the *unity* of the Order was guaranteed under the authority of the Master, and the *spread* of the Order through the Provinces - *diversity* - to guarantee the spread and inculturation of the Gospel message, trusting in the Holy Spirit, in the maturity of the brothers, in the system of government that supported them. All this ensures a *truly apostolic* life.

Saint Dominic did not "invent" his Constitutions. He is not one of those saints who surprise people, an "enlightened" saint. His own vocation is not sudden, we do not find in him a "stormy or tempestuous conversion". His very broad ecclesial experience from a very early age gave him a profound knowledge of the most important and varied manifestations of the "regular" tradition (monastic and canonical) and of the diocesan life of his time, in his own area (Palencia and Osma), later in the French Midi (Fanjeaux, Toulouse, etc.) and in what is now Italy. This experience helped him to give juridical form to his foundation, incorporating both the most ancient canonical norms and the most recent legislation of the Church, the fruit of the Fourth Lateran Council on preaching, the teaching of theology and the need to celebrate Provincial and General Chapters for the existing monastic Orders and canons regular. Added to this was his "first-hand" experience of the great vitality of associations of professors and students in university circles, of associations of artisans and of the beginnings of "municipal" (communal) structures based on moderate and participatory government. Finally, before his eyes was the challenge of the poor, itinerant Cathar preachers. They led him to discover, like St Francis, the need to do something similar and new, but within the Church itself!

An "apparent" obstacle, such as that of the famous Canon XIII of the Fourth Lateran Council, which forbade foundations of new "Orders", ended up being providentially a propelling force for the novelty of the Preachers. Together, gathered in chapter, Saint Dominic and his first group of friars chose the Rule of Saint Augustine, one of the oldest in the Church. They adopted the customs of the Premonstratensian Order and inserted the novelty of mendicant poverty and itinerancy, study and preaching. In this way the friars were incorporated in the most ancient religious tradition of the Church and at the same time guaranteed the absolute novelty of the project. Three sources of energy drawn from the Church of the 13th century or from the whole history of the Church are combined in the Order. An *official mission*:

*preaching. A regular form: the canonical tradition. A foundational idea (idea-strength): apostolic life or imitation of the Apostles.*

The Chapter of 1220 forged the constitutional model still in force today, which guarantees the unity of the Order. The Chapter of 1221 outlined the first model for the distribution of the Order into Provinces. It thus promoted a democratic, centralised and highly organised body, an Order, not a mere collection of houses or Provinces! This legislation, drawn up in stages and following the lessons of experience, very early determined and revealed, in a set of texts, the rules of community and obedience which would one day allow the founder to disappear without any risk to the Order. In fact, Saint Dominic died on 6 August 1221 and the Order had already been endowed with a minimum, solid structure to live its mission in the Church. Saint Dominic left no writings, only the Order and a well-delineated form of government. Many experts claim that much of the text of the Primitive Constitutions was incorporated in his own handwriting.

Let me outline some "key lines" of this style of government based on **freedom and responsibility**. First of all, it is necessary to underline that medieval canonical principle - perhaps somewhat forgotten - which expresses our style of government: "*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet*". Blessed Humbert of Romans, the fourth successor of Saint Dominic, would comment on this rule of law, writing with great common sense: "*the good, in fact, which is accepted by all, is promoted quickly and easily*".

The General Chapters succeeded one another with varying frequency. In 1228, the novel legislative process that the Order has retained to this day was already established: a disposition becomes a constitution only when *three consecutive General Chapters* take part in its approval with the following technical expressions: *initiation, approval and confirmation*. Let us recall that these three assemblies are of *different compositions*: a) *Elective General Chapter* (which elects the Master of the Order; the participants are Priors Provincial and Diffinitors or delegates elected by the Provinces gathered in Provincial Chapter); b) *General Chapter of Diffinitors*; c) *General Chapter of Provincials*, and so on. This is what has come to be called the famous "*Dominican bicameral system*". It is bicameral in several senses: 1) in the first place, for a law to become a constitution it must be dealt with, defined and voted by three different consecutive constituent legislative assemblies (General Chapters); 2) secondly, these assemblies are made up of different friars: those who do not hold authority in the Province (the diffinitors); the Provincials and friars on the same level as them; thirdly, a capitular assembly composed of both "types" of friars.

The General Chapters alternate, and each of them has the same powers. Briefly: various colleges, made up of various friars, with various functions, at various times, vote on the various laws governing the life of the Order itself. This fraternal communion of the capitular system is also manifested in the organic and proportionate participation of all the parts (convents, provinces) to achieve the end proper to the Order. This is why we say that our government is *communitarian in its own way*, for the superiors ordinarily obtain their office by election by the brethren, confirmed by a higher superior. Moreover, in resolving matters of major importance, the communities take part in many ways in their own government, through the Chapter or Council (at local, Provincial and general levels). The Order is "*synodal*" because from the very beginning, the brothers have lived, praised, governed, preached as brothers.

As a presupposition, we are faced with a theological tradition of the vow of obedience which is perhaps "different" from what we are used to in imagination or from - just as an example - a Benedictine or Jesuit perspective. Indeed, *obædire* (to obey) is intimately linked in our

tradition with *ob-audire* (to listen), which is why the vow of obedience is the only vow expressed in the Dominican formula of profession! That is the function of all authority in the Order: to listen to God, listening to him and making him heard through the voice of the brothers, the friars. We are convinced that in listening to the brothers we listen to the voice of God. That is why there is also an intimate connection between the *vow* we profess (vow of obedience) and the raised hands expressing a *yes* or *no*, or the ballots with names as an expression of the *vote* of each friar when decisions are taken, issues are defined, matters are dealt with or brothers are elected to certain offices or charges. The "*fratres, votemus*" which is so often heard from the lips of the president or secretary of the General Chapter, from the very origin of the Order, expresses vividly the sense of the *vow* of obedience which unites us personally to the Master of the Order. We also commit ourselves to obey those laws which we vote and those brothers whom we also elect by our vote.

Throughout time, we always try to ensure the means for livelihood and the means for community... but what will happen to these means for livelihood, we cannot know or say; indeed, there are things or dimensions of life (such as culture itself) that are "unplannable". All that can be done is to create spaces that will respect and facilitate the life forces that are not in our hands, that are not plannable! The unity and diversity of the Order are manifested in a complex organisation that requires continuous attention, evaluation and adaptation. It is not a "simple" system, but it is the sign of true "democracy", of true freedom.<sup>8</sup> This "ecosystem" that Saint Dominic bequeathed to his Family is fragile in texture, requires great patience and perseverance to cultivate and develop, and needs the involvement of all in a shared, common quest. "Pluralism" is not seen in the Order as a transitory illness to be "tolerated", but as a blessing that enriches our common heritage. We are pilgrims, itinerant, without fixed abode, and for us the creation of a community is always an "exploration", a community of those who - together - seek the truth, wherever it is to be found! Perhaps this is why, in a polemical text, Saint Albert the Great defined his ideal of Dominican life: "*In dulcedine societatis, quaerere veritatem*" (in the gentle harmony of fraternal life, seek the truth).



**Br. BRUNO CADORE, OP**

At the last General Chapter, without really knowing why and perhaps inadvertently, I asked the Secretary General to do the roll call of the capitulars not before the opening prayer which inaugurates the election process (as is customary) but after it. Afterwards, I was very happy about this because it made me much more aware than ever of the mystery of communion that presides over our Chapters. It is the Spirit who brings us together and makes our diversity a sign of communion, and it is in this sense that we can say that we "celebrate" our chapters. At that moment in Biên Hoà, there was neither a great noise nor a mighty gust of wind, and yet it was indeed a moment of Pentecost, bringing together friars from the ends of the earth, constituting them as a body, animating them towards the common search for the way in which they were going to propose to the friars of the Order that they continue their journey together by proclaiming the imminence of the Kingdom. In answering Ad Sum, each friar claims his place in the long tradition of the Order, and as they hear this reply, everyone becomes aware of the state of the Order and of its new faces and places; who the friars are and where they are, those to whom Dominic today has said go, study, preach and establish convents! It is an opportunity to give thanks for the work of the Spirit who drives and accompanies the Order in its itinerancy to meet its contemporaries throughout the world!

Dominic was right to assemble the first General Chapters on the feast of Pentecost. Basically, I think that the main task of General Chapters, as well as provincial, vicariate and conventual chapters, is to echo the call to follow the way opened by the Acts of the Apostles, because it is along this way that the Church becomes what it is called to be: a community of brothers and sisters whose unity is built up by inviting others to welcome the good news of Jesus Christ and live by it. Is this not what Pope Francis constantly reminds us when he invites us to "walk together" and calls us to "fraternity"? The mystery of communion promoted by the Spirit at the heart of human history!

But, like a sacrament, Chapters are signs of this mystery because they expose to the Word of grace and truth a very concrete human reality. That is to say, Chapters show that communion - and we might say fraternity as well - is a slow, patient, sometimes difficult work. Like the "work" of generating something new, of which the Apostle Paul spoke so well when he wrote of the creation groaning in the pains of childbirth. Chapters assemble brothers who do not know each other and yet recognise each other, meet and talk of ideas that might be mutually exclusive, yet in doing so they want to set aside any exclusive claim to truth in order really to "seek with others new paths towards the truth"; they bring together cultures so distant from one another, nonetheless convinced that each is irreplaceable and that none is sufficient alone to discover the richness of evangelisation. When we see all this, how can we fail to see in it the slow work of bringing about that great gathering prophesied by Isaiah (Is. 60)? Sometimes, perhaps even too often, we can be tempted to think of Chapters as an almost theoretical "exercise", not very effective, too wordy, far removed from concrete reality. And, then, we reduce Chapters to the text of the Acts, which sometimes we hardly read, or which, at other times, we are tempted to read and criticise as we would an essay! But this, I think, is to forget the mystery of a Chapter as something that gives shape to the adventure of this coming together (*ad-venire*). Communion in the Church doesn't mean forming a "working group" which can claim its evangelisation will be effective because it has set out objectives and a strategic plan! Rather, it means the journeying together of a group of men and women who, in doing so, are filled with the desire to discover that in Christ they are brothers and sisters whose aim is to bring the hope of a harvest into the heart of history. Communion in the Church forms not a battalion of sowers who aim for effective results, but rather a very fragile fraternity of nomadic harvesters who go out into the world in search of the traces of the Spirit, convinced that they will be able to do so as long as they continually extend their fraternity to those with whom they are given the chance to discover the mystery of friendship for all. And, at the heart of this communion in the Church, the Order of Dominic is called to be a sign of this adventure.

Our chapters are also instruments of communion when they allow themselves to be moments when brothers from all over the world, or from the four corners of a Province, or again from the diverse range of local apostolic commitments, celebrate the grace that God has given them of being harvesters of this kind. Our gathering in Chapter is the occasion for this kind of celebration, as can be seen in the meetings between the brothers, in the new friendships that are formed, in assemblies suddenly united in a single impulse of thanksgiving for such-and-such foundation... These are privileged moments when we can come to learn that, while there is a legitimate pride in telling what we are doing here or there, there is also a joy which is profound, and much more exciting, in discovering the strength of others' preaching; often they have an apostolic daring, missionary courage, and evangelical fidelity that we would perhaps never have dared to think about. We must constantly seek the best ways to move beyond a hasty labelling that risks chafing the "flesh" of holy preaching. Rather we must enable Provinces and entities of the Order to get to know each other as they share with each other their history and their reading of the signs of the times, and so adopt one another and recognise themselves as members together of the same "holy preaching", united by the same vocation to proclaim to the world the good news of God's friendship for all.

During my term of office, I often felt, when listening to this or that brother or sister, or when visiting this or that community, that I was in the presence of men and women who were truly seized by the mysterious power of a Word for which reason alone could not account, just as it also exceeded the capacity of the human heart to welcome so much grace. Then I found myself dreaming that our Chapters might be places where this overabundance of the grace of the Word would be shared and transmitted, for this is the foundation of our communion. In order to bring the intelligence of the heart of a Chapter to the fore, the intelligence that will guide its discernment, it is not enough to exchange ideas or analyses of reality, we must also give ourselves the means to touch hearts, to graze them somehow. In Creole, they sing before the Gospel "Pawol Bondye apral blese kè nou". How can we provide ourselves with the means which would enable the adventure of preaching to one another in a Chapter to "wound" everyone's hearts? Is it not from such a wound that communion is born?

Our General Chapters have three characteristics that help answer this question. Firstly, their composition. Representation in the Chapter doesn't simply correspond to the number of people, but seeks to reflect the diversity of preaching. The Provinces are represented as entities, in a manner which differs according to the number of friars, but also by giving space to the specificity of each place where the Order has sent friars to "study, preach and found a convent".

The second feature is inviting all the brothers to take part in the preparation of the General Chapter. Certainly, we can be fairly proud of the elements which structure our current way of doing things: the modes of representation (election of diffinitors and socii who represent not primarily or only a number of people but the reality of the preaching mission as established in specific places), the alternation of Chapters composed in various ways (diffinitors, Provincials, elective), pre-Chapter commissions and work groups, the wider distribution of reports made at the Chapter, petitions sent by the brothers to the Chapter (the practice of which should no doubt be further promoted).

The third trait echoes what Brother Vincent de Couesnongle liked to call the "democratic search for unanimity". In fact, our attachment to "democracy" is not primarily aimed at majority decision-making, but at implementing a mode of "conversation" among ourselves that allows the emergence of orientations that can be supported by all. At a time when, almost everywhere, a crisis of confidence in politics is emerging, the Order's way of life expresses an unwavering confidence in the capacity of human beings to converse, to debate, to engage with ideas and arguments peacefully and so try to deploy together a "collective intelligence" which all can rely on to formulate together the best possible solution to a given question. How often it happens that we come into a Chapter with a certain number of ideas in mind for facing and resolving a question, and we leave the Chapter debate astonished to see how the assembly has progressively taken a direction that no one had thought of, daring to shift the question, trusting a brother or a group that no one would have thought of, waiting for a path to appear which might be unexpected, but which nevertheless appears to be so much more appropriate!

Thus, it seems to me that the Order's General Chapters give a witness in the Church to what an adventure it can be to come together (ad-venire) in communion for the sake of the evangelisation of the Word of life and truth, faithful to the initial propositum of Dominic, who dreamed of serving the mission of the Church in the world. And this was the path of his holiness...



**Br. GERARD TIMONER, OP**

I am grateful to **brother Timothy, fray Carlos and frère Bruno** for their insightful recollections and reflections on our General Chapters. Surely, like St. Dominic, they served the Order as itinerant brothers, visiting the brothers and sisters all over the world. Indeed, a remarkable aspect of their *itinerancy* was not only going on a “pilgrimage” of the Order i.e., visiting provinces and convents, but also *walking-with-the-Order* from one general chapter to the next. **They gave us not only an account of “the good things they have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20) along the way but presented to us important lessons and reasons for walking-together on the way to God.** This dynamic of journeying together is clearly stated in the Rule which St. Dominic adopted for the Order “to be of one heart and mind *on the way to God*”<sup>9</sup>. For Augustine, oneness of mind and heart i.e., communion seems static, without an explicit telos. Thus he adds: *on the way to God*.

Jesus called the first disciples to follow him, to journey with Him on the way (*hodos*), to learn from Him, who is the Truth, the *Way* and the Life (John 14:6). At the moment they left everything to follow Him, the disciples did not fully comprehend where such a journey would bring them, or how it would change their lives or those of others. But the time they spent living with and listening to Jesus *formed* them into a community of disciples and, eventually, into witnesses and preachers of the resurrection. *Being with Jesus on the way* is an important qualification: “it is necessary that one of the men who accompanied us the whole time the Lord Jesus came and went among us,... become with us a witness to his resurrection.” In like manner, formation in the life and mission of the Order is a *conditio sine qua non* for full participation in the governance of the Order. For this reason, it is only after years of formation that a brother becomes a member of a conventual chapter.

The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus presents elements that can help us grow in our “communitarian government” (LCO VII) or “capitular government” (RFG, 16). The two were walking together, just as Jesus told those whom he sent to preach the Kingdom. However, they were walking away from Jerusalem, the community of the apostles, because they had lost hope: “we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel”. Then Jesus *walked* with them, explained the Scriptures and broke bread. Listening to the Word opened their minds, the breaking of the bread restored their hope!

In the Church, the Eucharistic assembly (*synaxis*) is the most basic, hence the most universal expression and actualization of the “synodal” feature of the Church<sup>10</sup>. Perhaps it is for this reason that the General Chapter of Trogir in 2013 exhorted the brothers: “Our Constitutions remind us that the Conventual Mass is the clearest sign of our unity in the Church and in the Order; therefore ‘it is preferable that the Conventual Mass be concelebrated’ by the priestly brothers”<sup>11</sup>. As we conclude this letter, I invite you to reflect on the parts of the Eucharist, the sacrament that brings us together every day, and see how these will help us grow more in our communitarian form of government.<sup>12</sup>

**Gathered in the name of the Trinity.** The Eucharist begins with the sign of the cross and the invocation of the Trinity. Frère Bruno insightfully looks at the inversion of the roll call of capitulars and the opening prayer at the last General Chapter in Biên Hòa: “It is the Spirit that brings us together and makes our diversity a sign of communion, and it is in this horizon that we can say that we are ‘celebrating’ our chapters.” A gathering that is convoked in the name of God, signifies that its acts are done *in His Name*. In a profound sense, the Church becomes a sacrament of Christ for it becomes a bearer of his Presence: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Thus, when divisions arise or lines of fracture become manifest in a community on account of differences

in conviction or persuasion, then it is time to pause and conscientiously consider whether adherence to such divisive convictions is truly done *in God's name* and reveals Christ's presence in their midst.

**Reconciliation.** A gathering convoked in the name of the Trinity fosters communion by an act of reconciliation with God and with one another. The *confessio peccati* celebrates God's merciful love and expresses a desire not to allow the divisive tendency of sin get in the way of unity: "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt. 5:23-24). If the decisions we take in a chapter are ultimately for the sake of helping us preach the Gospel, then the conviction that "*reconciliation is an important path to the new evangelization*"<sup>13</sup> is worthy of our serious consideration.

**Prayerful dialogue.** Within the Eucharistic celebration, we listen to the proclamation of the Word of God, and to its elucidation in the homily. Essentially, preaching God's word is *dialogic*: for the preaching to truly convey God's message, the preacher and his hearers must contemplate God's word; for preaching to touch the hearts of the people, the preacher must listen attentively to the life-situations of his people. This dialogic structure in the liturgy is a paradigm for dialogue in communal discernment: before we listen to one another, we must first listen, in prayerful contemplation, to God's word, that we may truly discern His will for our community. *Speaking either with God or about God*<sup>14</sup>, St. Dominic embodied this two-fold listening. Br. Timothy pointed out that our "democratic structure" is truly Dominican: "if our debating and voting is an attempt to hear the Word of God summoning us to walk in the way of discipleship".<sup>15</sup> Fray Carlos highlighted the "horizontal" dimension of this dialogue that is rooted in *misericordia*: "compassion brings humility to our preaching - humility for which we are willing to listen and speak, to receive and give, that we may influence and be influenced, to be evangelized and to evangelize".<sup>16</sup>

**Communion.** The grace (*res tantum*) of the Eucharist is communion with God and with one another.<sup>17</sup> "The Eucharist *creates* communion and *fosters* communion"<sup>18</sup>. The birth of the Church at Pentecost is an event where people coming, literally, from different roads converged. The graced capacity of this *ekklesia* to embrace diversity, to be truly *katholikos* has brought many peoples from "different roads and walks of life" to a singular direction, as men and women who are first known as belonging to *The Way, hodos* (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14,22).<sup>19</sup> "

**Mission.** *Ite, missa est.* Communion is ordered towards being sent, towards mission. One who receives holy communion is impelled to share, to bring Jesus to others. In like manner, our fraternal communion is always oriented beyond ourselves, towards mission, to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

In a general chapter, brothers come from all parts of the world to celebrate our communion as Dominicans. After the conclusion of the chapter, they go home to their provinces. Paradoxical as it may seem, even as they part ways and go to different directions, they continue to walk together, for we all belong to the family of St. Dominic, *lumen ecclesiae*, and we have one mission: to radiate the light of Christ, the Word-Incarnate, to the world.

  
Master of the Order

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Though a more literal translation is “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials”, the Greek text conveys a Spirit-led discernment and decision by the apostles, which is rendered a bit loosely yet clearly as “we have decided, the Holy Spirit and us...”

<sup>2</sup> This Jewish practice of casting of lots is made “in the presence of the Lord”; for instance, Joshua cast lots when he allotted the lands to the Israelites (Joshua 18:6,8,10). True, it is the Lord, not blind chance, who decides: “into the bag the lot is cast, but from the Lord comes every decision” (Proverbs 16:33).

<sup>3</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Ephesios* IX, 2; Franz Xaver Funk (ed.), *Patres apostolici* I, Tubingen: H. Laupp, 1901, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew of Paris, quoted by Marie-Dominique Chenu OP, ‘L’Ordre de saint Dominique: A-t-il encore sa chance?’. A conference given in Toulouse, October 11th, 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. My translation (T.Radcliffe).

<sup>6</sup> Zygmund Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Fergus Kerr OP, ‘Charity as friendship’ in Brian Davies OP (ed.), *Language, Meaning and God: Essays in honour of Herbert McCabe OP*, London: G. Chapman, 1987, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> This balance between permanent newness in the Order and its centuries-old tradition is stressed by Henri Lacordaire in his *Memoire for the restoration of the Order in France*: “Perhaps you will also ask me why I preferred to re-establish an old Order rather than found a new one. I will answer two things: First, the grace of founding an Order is the highest and rarest grace that God gives to his saints, and I have not received it. Secondly, if God were to grant me the power to create a religious Order, I am sure that, after much reflection, I would discover nothing new more adapted to our time and its needs than the Constitutions of Saint Dominic; they have only their history of antiquity and I would see no reason to torture the intelligence for the mere pleasure of being of yesterday”.

<sup>9</sup> The Rule of St. Augustine (*textus receptus ab Ordine*) found in the LCO states: *et sit vobis anima una et cor unum (Act 4, 32) in Deo*. In this version, “in Deo” (ablative) indicates position which is static. However, the *Regula ad servos Dei* (PL 32) uses “in Deum” (accusative) which conveys movement, i.e., “towards God or Godward”. In this letter, I proffer for reflection, the version with a “dynamic” sense i.e., “in Deum”, which St. Augustine used in explaining what “living in unity” means: *Et quid est, in unum? Et erat illis, inquit, anima una et cor unum in Deum. (Enarrationes in Psalmos, 132,2, PL 36)* and in his letter to nuns written around 434, where he used the same expression: *Primum propter quod estis in unum congregatae, ut unanimes habitetis in domo, et sit vobis cor unum et anima una in Deum* (Epistola 211, 5, PL 33; all Latin texts are from the Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana edition). For this reason, Van Bavel avers that: “È caratteristico di Agostino aggiungere quasi sempre all’idea di “un cuor solo e un’anima sola, tratta degli Atti degli apostoli, la frase: “in cammino verso Dio” (It is typical of Augustine to add almost always to the idea of “one heart and one soul,” from the Acts of the Apostles, the phrase: “on the way to God”. Cf. Tarsicius Van Bavel OSA, *La Regola di Agostino d’Ippona*, Palermo: Edizioni Augustinus, 1986, p. 48.

<sup>10</sup> “Εκκλησία συνόδου ἐστὶν ὄνομα” “church is another word for synod” cf. John Chrysostom, *Exp. in Psalm.*, 149, 1: PG 55, 493.

<sup>11</sup> LCO 59 §§ I & II, ACG Trogir 63 (2013) n°3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2018), 109.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict XVI, Homily, Opening Liturgy, Synod of Bishops (2012).

<sup>14</sup> Fundamental Constitution of the Order of Preachers, II.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy Radcliffe OP, ‘Freedom and Responsibility’ in Id., *Sing a New Song: The Christian Vocation*, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1999, p. 86. I wish to note that as is often said, obedience, is the principle of unity. It is the virtue that brings us closer to God and to one another: “All this made us realize that we can deepen our relationship with the word of God only within the “WE” of the Church,

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in mutual listening and acceptance” (cf. Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 4). True, the virtue of obedience fosters dialogue but discussions cannot go *ad infinitum*. Thus, after everyone has been given fair hearing, the competent body (chapter, council) or the one in charge of the community (prior, provincial, master of the Order) have the duty to articulate a decision based on what were heard and on pertinent laws. We recall that after listening to everyone, James, who was leader of the Jerusalem community pronounced his judgment (Acts 15:19), a judgment that was an outcome of a communal discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28). See recent articles on our form of government: Viliam Stefan Doci OP, ‘Democracy – a hallmark of the Dominican Order?’ in *Wort und Antwort* 62/1 (2021), pp. 6-11 and Benjamin Earl OP, ‘Spirituality of Dominican Legislation for the Exercise of Government’ in *Analecta Ordinis Praedicatorum* 126 (2018), pp. 99-111.

<sup>16</sup> Carlos Azpiroz-Costa OP, ‘El anuncio del evangelio en la Orden de Predicadores (dominicos)’, in *Analecta Ordinis Praedicatorum* 110 (2002), p. 488.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas OP, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 73, a. 4, resp.

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 40.

<sup>19</sup> *hē hodos* is a uniquely Lucan name for the early Christians as a group. See Joseph Fitzmyer, SJ, ‘The Designation of Early Christians in Acts and their Significance’ in *To Advance the Gospel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998, pp. 320-321.