



Fratres Ordinis Prædicatorum
CURIA GENERALITIA

Rome, May 24 2014

Feast of the Translation of our Holy Father Saint Dominic

Mendicants and being in solidarity with others
For a culture of solidarity at the service of preaching

In a world where there has never been so much wealth, so much money in circulation, but where the gulf between rich and poor constantly widens, the Order cannot remain ignorant of this reality, nor let the “logic of the world” determine our relationships. For this reason, and in order to root our preaching in the concern for a more equitable world, we must develop a genuine and challenging “culture of solidarity” among ourselves. Such a culture will help to reinforce our unity, a fundamental characteristic of our Order.

Introduction: out of mendicancy, a culture of solidarity

Mendicancy

The Order of Preachers was founded as a mendicant Order and, even if it is clear that the times are different, it is important to take account of this when we speak of our Dominican identity. We know that Dominic made a very radical demand concerning poverty. In his time, he wanted to choose a state of life in solidarity with those who were in destitution. He insisted also upon a rule not to have any property, whether personal or in common. This naturally led to the adoption of a state of mendicancy, following the example of Jesus (cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III 40 3). However, besides being the consequence of a choice for quite a radical relationship with poverty, mendicancy also indicates a choice to live in dependence upon those to whom the preachers are sent, mirroring the dependence of Jesus and his disciples as they go through towns and villages proclaiming the Kingdom of God (Lk 8,1-3). This dependence manifests the will to take the risk of a certain material vulnerability and, after the example of St Dominic, abandonment to divine Providence, as well as a choice for itinerant preaching. In this way, to speak of solidarity in the universal mission of evangelisation implies the necessity of mutual support in this mission of evangelical itinerancy, at once qualifying our life (itinerancy because of the Gospel), and also determining our goals (itinerancy in order to give the Gospel).

The choice for such a vulnerable mendicancy is far from evident today for several reasons. Of course we must fulfil a certain number of obligations, such as formation of the youngest brothers or providing the best healthcare possible for the oldest, health insurance and pensions for retirement, as well as reasonable maintenance for our living and liturgical spaces. Given the reality of social vulnerability of which there are many victims in many countries, it would not be sane or just to pretend that we identify with this. There are already established systems of solidarity among the different strata of a given society, and religious cannot willingly put themselves in a position where these systems would be obliged to support various needs, even if they may have the means to do so. Nevertheless, the choice of a certain “frugality” and simplicity of life must be a determined choice, in order not to distance ourselves from the most vulnerable, and not to find ourselves “dependents” of the well-off and the powerful without really having decided this. And yet, we must recognise that, gradually,

we have become used to a certain quality of life that obliges us to secure appropriate necessary resources, and that we are not always ready to lower the quality of life and comfort that we enjoy in many countries. In the same way, in some places, we have become used to being proprietors of many important buildings (or even seeking to become proprietors) which we would consider it difficult to sell in order to secure the most essential needs, and despite having to rely upon the generosity of others to help us meet those needs. Therefore we must not be flippant and a reflection upon mendicancy must be for us a call to evaluate objectively and with humility that to which such a choice commits us and what real needs there are for which we deem it legitimate to ask help from benefactors. One question in particular must concern us: how much does our state of mendicancy make us dependent upon others to support the needs of our daily lives, and to what extent do we think of mendicancy as the modern way of asking others to support the needs we have determined? Or on the other hand – and this is more just – from the “living relationship” (LCO, 99 II) we have with them, do we want to learn to rely on others to determine the quality of life that would be most appropriate for our mission of preaching?

Solidarity and common goods

The last two General Chapters (ACG Rome 2010 §§57, 72-73; ACG Trogir 2013 §§48, 57, 111, 209) invited us to ask such questions about our way of living poverty and mendicancy in considering the more general theme of a true *culture of solidarity*. This perspective can help us avoid the risk (often mentioned during my visits to the Provinces) of making apostolic choices that, in reality, by following criteria more relevant to improving economic security rather than the mission, many brothers say they regret. In visiting the Provinces I learn, for example, that brothers regret the necessity to keep what is quite a lucrative position but which prevents a response to a more urgent need. Or, that the choice to remain in such and such a place is less related to a real need and more to the place’s profitability. Economic questions must, of course, be taken into account in the organisation of our apostolic life, but how do we make sure they do not become a constraining criterion, which serves as an obstacle to our response to the needs of evangelisation or to our creativity?

Since the foundation of the Order, many forms of solidarity have existed between the different entities. These have allowed the development of our mission and reinforced the fraternal links of solidarity through the centuries. However, a shared culture reinforced by solidarity presents us (among other demands) with hearing the call not to be centred upon ourselves but to ‘expropriate ourselves’ – to use the beautiful expression suggested by Cardinal Ratzinger in 2000 to describe the spiritual requirement for the New Evangelisation. This expropriation of ourselves through concern for the needs of others is a medium from which the consciousness of a common apostolic responsibility would emerge, in which it would be rooted, and in view of which we could structure our concrete material life. In this way, solidarity does not mean only a fund of resources thanks to which each can achieve his own projects with the economic help of others, but rather a shared mode of living based upon a common concern for Preaching which makes us ever more capable of adjusting our concrete life to the real apostolic needs we have undertaken in a spirit of solidarity for all.

Let us take as an example the initial formation of brothers, which is one of the priorities of this communal responsibility, because the preparation of friars preachers for tomorrow ought to be everyone’s concern. In this area, we can find a real inequality between the brothers of the Order, whether it is to do with resources for maintaining the daily life of houses of formation, for study (libraries, equipment, university registration), or for the possibility of experiencing the universality of the Order. Yet, each brother in formation will make profession for the Order, and we ought to discover how we can better acknowledge this reality from an economic point of view, in order that each can benefit from the necessary

resources for his formation and initial studies. I can emphasise the same need for solidarity concerning complementary and specialised academic studies for which the Provinces have the obligation to prepare brothers to take on this dimension for the mission of the Order. In some Provinces, the achievement of solidarity in this area of formation already exists and the generosity of certain entities is commendable. Without doubt, we can further improve the efficiency of this support by better structuring solidarity at the level of the entire Order. For example, through adaptation and ongoing collaboration in many existing formation structures in Provinces that are able to provide resources; support for still fragile houses of formation; bursaries for study; structured collaboration for teaching; availability to reinforce communities of formation, etc...

When we speak of solidarity, the Scripture reference that springs immediately to mind is that of the first community described in the Acts of the Apostles, where “all who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). The challenge, we know well, is not only that of sharing with others, and even less of sharing, out of our generous “good will”, what we have left over. It is above all that of having ‘a priori’ a concern for the needs of others and to consider these needs in some way as our own. Sometimes we are tempted to regard possessing things in common as the only economic point of view, but we must take a larger perspective that encourages also a solidarity that helps us respond with what is needed for apostolic tasks or for the reinforcement of communities because of our common apostolic responsibility. The sin of withholding goods, recounted in Acts, is not primarily a lie, but rather abandoning the concern for the unity of all that presumes unconditionally trust and mutual respect. Mendicancy is like a school, which teaches us how to take on the role of being a mendicant based upon the concern of others for our needs. Holding all things in common, in its turn, is a pedagogy for the defence of the common good, the fruit of the concern for the needs of others.

Renewal in the Order

The call to develop a culture of solidarity was launched by the last few General Chapters at the same time as they called for a *restructuring of the Order*. This restructuring is rooted in a perspective of renewal to which the coming celebration of the Jubilee of the Order invites us. So, such a restructuring should not be defined as a rationalisation of our structures but as a determination to better orient our modes of organisation towards the mission of preaching. The challenge is that of promotion and support of the Order’s preaching for the Church in new places or in particularly difficult places. In this area, it is essential not only to consider strong, organised, well established and secure situations. The danger of our new structures in a “globalised” world is actually to give preference to the strongest, inviting the weak to join the strong or to be put under their protection, placing them at the mercy of the good will of the strong. In our effort of restructuring, we must on the contrary consider the complementarity between all forms of presence of the Order’s preaching, whether strong or weak. The beginnings of a new mission, for example, can be fragile and vulnerable, and require extended and coherent support even if, sometimes, we may want to take effective decisions very quickly. We also know that some particularly important places of preaching are and remain particularly vulnerable, rarely able to sustain preachers, which calls for the implementation of a long-lasting solidarity. The only possible point of view is, once again, that of the common responsibility of preaching, which allows us, all together, to give ourselves the opportunity of bringing the Word to the most difficult places, where fragility and vulnerability will be the very condition of an evangelical witness.

Obviously, such a culture of solidarity must be placed in the global context of the world. One of the characteristics of the “global world” is the gulf that grows between rich and poor. In a certain sense, this gulf grows also among us – between the Provinces, and sometimes even at the heart of a Province, between its communities. This gulf grows also between us and the most vulnerable sector of a population to whom we are sent (in terms of travel and communication, access to healthcare, education...). To think of a culture of solidarity obliges us to be clear about what it means when we are sent to live as brothers to the world. For, through this fraternity, we witness to the Word spoken to all to bring us into friendship with God. In this sense, solidarity teaches us to give birth to fraternity, both at the heart of our communities and in our relationship with those to whom we are sent.

Solidarity and the vows

Solidarity is not one of the three classic vows of religious life, but, in this perspective of mendicancy, we can understand how a culture of solidarity as mentioned above in fact concerns the three classic vows of consecrated life. When in the Order we pronounce *the vow of obedience*, we ask for the grace to consecrate our lives to the Word in the itinerancy of a preacher. In a certain sense, we take vows to be mendicant because we are preachers.

Dominic asked the first friars to promise him obedience for the common life. I think in this way, he was insisting upon the link between preaching and the work of fraternity, implicitly affirming that the service of preaching is intimately linked to the mystery of the grace by which Christ establishes his Church as Fraternity given to the world as the sign of the hope of salvation. Engagement in the common life is not primarily a moral observance, but rather a proclamation of hope in this mysterious work of giving birth to fraternity. The first companions in Jesus’s preaching saw how he formed a solidarity with humanity, a solidarity with those who did not have a place in a society established by human beings – such as the leper, the man born blind, and the paralytic, or even the publican and sinners with whom he agrees to share a table. It is solidarity with all for the salvation of all. In this way, the disciples learnt to live this solidarity themselves (cf. Luke 8-10; Matt 10) as the preferred path for preaching. The apostolic letters of Paul show how difficult it could be for new believers, over time, to establish true solidarity among themselves. The letters insist upon the essential character of this economic aspect in the life of Christ’s disciples. The witness of fraternal life is not that of a moral ideal which is already fully realised. It is rather that of a hope that the human being is capable of being converted to fraternity, in becoming gradually dependent upon brothers and sisters who have been given to him, inspired by the same example of Christ (see 2 Cor 8-9, where Paul proposes a paradigm for a theological reflection on solidarity between Christian communities). In this sense, dependent fraternity is a preferential modality for “announcing the Kingdom”. The promise to obey, to hear the Word, letting it guide us to be put at its service for the good of all, seals our entry into solidarity.

Every conversion is, ultimately, a work of grace. But, it is given to those who want to acquire the means and practical conditions in order to be used by this grace. From this point of view, we can say that living *the vow of poverty* is a means for this preparation. We cannot deny a real paradox in our religious lives: poor or mendicants from the beginning, how easy it has been, and how rapid, to move into a rather “bourgeois” and individualistic life! This is true from a collective point of view, and we understand well why Dominic wanted to guard against the instinct for property, which risks attaching us to goods more than making us available for the mobility for preaching. But this is also true from a personal point of view. It is true for many among us who, coming to the Order with so few things, must at each new assignation organise an ever more substantial removal service as we accumulate books and goods of all kinds. And this is without mentioning the social or academic positions to which

we rise. The vow of poverty must invite us, daily, to be uprooted from this tendency to “secure” our life for ourselves, in preference to allowing those “living relationships” with people (and with the brothers of our community or Province) to be, at last, our true security. From this we will each be given “a hundredfold”.

We should not be attached to those specific places that would keep us indifferent to others, but rather, we should accept being in solidarity with others in the countries to which we are sent. It is necessary to work together to gain more and more simplicity and frugality of life, not by an unhealthy pleasure at being a “hero” to poverty, leading to self-importance, but to gain an interior liberty. To gain also a mutual trust that allows us to believe He will truly give to each according to his needs. The *essential link between the vow of poverty and the determination to hold our goods in common* is often emphasised. Yet, it must be recognised that holding all things in common is one of the greatest difficulties encountered by communities, and also between communities in the Provinces. Everyone knows the many strategies with which we attempt to hijack this commitment and we know that this is one of the most difficult aspects of the common life. Experiencing this difficulty means tasting, in our own experience of life, the challenge that every call to solidarity with others represents: the common life, in its daily sharing of fraternal life, in the capitular organisation of the community, as well as in the actual management of common goods, is a type of “pedagogy” for solidarity. From this point of view, bringing to community a concern for a true and strong solidarity among us (meaning between communities and/or Provinces), but also building a real solidarity with the poor of our world, is a call to take seriously the commitment to choose to organise our personal and common lives under the sign of vulnerability rather than under that of absolute security. Again and again, make the choice to be uprooted and “expropriate oneself”...

The religious vow of chastity belongs in this same project, calling also for a kind of affective uprooting. After several months in a community living in a very vulnerable place in proximity to many victims of poverty, a friar may say, in such an apostolate, the pertinent vow for the religious is not so much poverty but rather chastity. Indeed, being subject to poverty is unenviable and should not be considered a “value” in itself. But the commitment to solidarity with the poor calls us to deepen and cultivate our commitment to chastity, which is an appropriate distance that truly opens a space for the freedom of all. The vulnerability in continent celibacy, to which the vow of chastity leads, is that of a type of insecurity in solitude, taking the opportunity that this lack will give birth to a keener readiness to see our capacity for solidarity in the way Christ lived in His humanity. Thus, chastity leads both to a certain way of being, and also to learning a certain quality of relationship with those who are in need, discovering that the issue is not meeting needs, but joining destinies in a relationship of solidarity which frees each one.

Solidarity in the mission and witness for the world

During my visits, it has been always very important to recall the organic unity of our Order. The Order is not a sum of entities, each one autonomous, under contract like a “federation”, no more than a Province is a juxtaposed sum of communities, nor a community a juxtaposition of individual brothers. This image of an organic reality (somehow integrated: cf. LCO 1, VII) is, in itself, a way of announcing the Kingdom. If we aspire to a world of which the God of the Covenant can accept being King, in which the human being no longer seeks other “kings” created in his own image, it is necessary – within our human capacities and limits – to seek to create a world habitable for all. Such a world cannot be reduced to a contractual organisation between entities or autonomous individuals. It must be a world

where the destinies of all are joined in the same existence because they share the same hope in God who is both source and communion between human beings, and it calls for their active participation. This is the preaching of fraternity, to which the commitment to solidarity specifically contributes.

From this perspective, the issue in our communities of our relationship to material goods and especially money, raises not only the idea of “sociality” we want to promote, but also a real hope we have in the transformative power of the “work of fraternal communion” (cf E. Lévinas, “Socialité et argent”, in C. Chalier et M. Abensour, *Cahier de l’Herne. Emmanuel Lévinas*, Editions de l’Herne, Paris, 1991, p. 134-138 – a text in which sociality means the dynamic of social relationships which organise and determine a society and culture). The rules that guide us in this area are not there to “moralise” the religious life, but rather to fix us within a theological horizon and to give our concrete practices an eschatological perspective. In this view (and with the strength of the hope it gives us) we can dare to confront the current failures in order to correct them (parallel economies, resistance to holding things in common, consumerism, safeguarding one’s personal life, priority given to family ties or to private means over communal solidarity, alliances established on the basis of affective dependencies...). Such corrections will not, in the first place, ask for moral judgements of individuals but rather for creativity in the solidarity of fraternal life. It is also from this theological point of view that we can dare to define priorities in favour of the poorest in a community, the least fortunate, the least productive. This point of view will guide how we can establish the interdependence of solidarity at the heart of our community (common management, giving to each according to his needs).

This perspective will also be one that directs relationships of solidarity at the heart of a Province. In a Province, certain questions are often raised: for example, the distinction between rich and poor communities (sometimes, the richest help the poorest, but in some cases according to criteria which the richest set); or an inequality between communities that conduct their affairs with all the necessary transparency and those who practice a certain secrecy. In many places apostolic institutions have been created that promote preaching, but which can also gradually be tempted to become autonomous in relation to the Province and a brother in charge makes himself virtually the project’s owner. In a more general way, several Provinces have been led to reflect upon the bonds that are gradually formed between apostolic choices and the concern for economic profitability. While this aspect can certainly not be ignored, we must avoid preaching activities that direct our solidarity to that which ensures our own security for indefinite economic reasons. So, it is necessary to call to mind the relationship that can be built at the heart of a Province with the communities, institutions, or even with Vicariates deemed unable to participate. In view of this, too often the economic reality becomes the first, sometimes the only, way of seeking to build relationships with others.

Through all these things, how does the Order appear to the world? It is important to be aware of this so that we can also recognise the radical demand of working for a fraternal communion for the world. The issue of the option for the poor is central because it is a criterion for analysis, for authenticity, for decentring (to whom do we come close?). How can our communities be joined through solidarity and extend this solidarity to the whole of a Province or even the Order?

Questions are raised in the Order, in particular concerning health and initial formation, which are two areas where there is the greatest inequality among us. But we can also question

close ties to particular situations that might seem quite unsuitable from the perspective of the whole Order. In the same way, we should point out a great inequality regarding the provision of means for the apostolic life, or apostolic engagement – which sometimes means apostolic freedom. For example, we can accept (or even request) responsibility for parishes in order to live, instead of giving priority to education, to the promotion of the poor or of women, or to the protection of children.

In order for solidarity to work among us, it is indispensable that we demand clarity, transparency and responsibility for specific objectives. At the same time, it is also important that we do not ask the weakest, those who have the most essential needs, for the same accountability we ask from the strongest. This is how the world works, certainly, but it is important for us who want to preach the Gospel by word and example to resist this temptation.

Building a culture of solidarity

Responding to the request of the General Chapter of Rome, (which charged the Master of the Order with establishing an “office for supporting mission” (ACG Rome 2010, 231)) a solidarity office – whose name is now *Spem Miram Internationalis* – has been in place for three years. Its main goal is to encourage the development of the culture of solidarity I mentioned and to manage solidarity funds from this perspective. Such management should be undertaken in line with this culture of solidarity, just as it finds its relevance in the promotion of solidarity so that all can support a “common culture of solidarity”.

We can identify some prerequisites for this culture. It must be rooted in a common apostolic consciousness and its priorities agreed together. For example, it would not be possible to develop solidarity in the area of initial formation if we are not all convinced that it is more important to promote the vocation of every brother for the Order than to restrict ourselves only to the concern of the entity to which we belong. Let me emphasise again the fact that the Order is not a “federation” of Provinces, even if it is very important that the entities have true local roots, both culturally and ecclesially. This rooting in the “particular” is essential for each entity to contribute to the promotion of the mission of the Order at the service of the Universal Church. A solidarity among us can build to the extent that we develop a real consciousness and mutual esteem for the projects undertaken by each other. In the end, if we want to progress in solidarity, this presumes that every one, each entity, be animated by a true determination to keep to what is “truly necessary”, putting everything at the disposition of everyone.

In this perspective, I ask all the entities, communities and Provinces, to reflect upon a better manner of living the solidarity that is at the heart of the Order. It is possible to identify several ways of contributing to this project of solidarity: regular contributions of communities and Provinces to the solidarity funds of the Order that support apostolic projects and the formation of the most fragile entities; collaborations for the formation of young brothers; thematic collaborations (for example in the field of education or of the protection of children); sharing our “human resources” (professors, pastors, experts); partial responses to calls; sharing of “relational resources” (we are often quite “jealous” of our benefactors!). Communities and Provinces can, each at their level, decide to support these solidarity projects for the Order. *Spem Miram Internationalis* follows projects to suggest to the Master of the Order, and sees that the money is used wisely so that donor communities and Provinces are assured of what happens to their generous contributions (cf *Spem Miram Internationalis* website, www.spemmiram.org, which presents its objectives and the process for projects

applying. There are forms for submitting projects and reports on projects currently supported by the different funds).

Obviously, a good dynamic of solidarity calls for a number of conditions. There is, of course, the requirement of clear accounts, a report of what is achieved, the expression of gratitude; but, there is also the desire not to get locked into attitudes of victimization and infantile dependence. One brother, and others agree, let me know that our dynamic of solidarity would probably be enhanced if we discovered all together how to implement a project of solidarity with someone other than ourselves. It expresses the dream that this be a way for us to celebrate the Jubilee of the Order: to give to the world what we have received!

This seems a suitable point upon which to conclude this letter on the culture of solidarity. Of course, we need to develop solidarity among ourselves further, and this will be an essential element for consolidating the unity of the Order. But as I have emphasised at the beginning of this letter, such a culture must constantly refer to the fact that Dominic gave us an Order which chooses to be preachers by being mendicants, imitating Him whose coming we want to announce to the world. The Word of life presents himself as a mendicant, relying on the hospitality of humanity, in order to demonstrate that in His Son, God wants to be in solidarity with the world.

Your brother,

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Prot. 50/14/370 Letters_to_the Order