

1. THE FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTION

I. The purpose of the Order was expressed by Pope Honorius III writing to St. Dominic and his brothers in these words: "He who ever makes His Church fruitful with new offspring,(1) wanting to make these modern times measure up to former times, and to propagate the Catholic faith, inspired you with a holy desire by which, having embraced poverty and made profession of regular life, you have given yourselves to the proclamation of the Word of God, preaching the name of our Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world."(2)

II. For the Order of Friars Preachers founded by St. Dominic "is known from the beginning to have been instituted especially for preaching and the salvation of souls."(3) Our brethren, therefore, according to the command of the founder "must conduct themselves honorably and religiously as men who want to obtain their salvation and the salvation of others, following in the footsteps of the Savior as evangelical men speaking among themselves or their neighbors either with God or about God."(4)

III. In order that we may be perfected in the love of God and neighbor through this following of Christ, we are incorporated into our Order by profession and consecrated totally to God, and in particular we are dedicated in a new way to the universal Church, "being appointed entirely for the complete evangelization of the Word of God."(5)

IV. We also undertake as sharers of the apostolic mission the life of the Apostles in the form conceived by St. Dominic, living with one mind the common life, faithful in the profession of the evangelical counsels, fervent in the common celebration of the liturgy, especially of the Eucharist and the divine office as well as other prayer, assiduous in study, and persevering in regular observance. All these practices contribute not only to the glory of God and our sanctification, but serve directly the salvation of mankind, since they prepare harmoniously for preaching, furnish its incentive, form its character, and in turn are influenced by it. These elements are closely interconnected and carefully balanced, mutually enriching one another, so that in their synthesis the proper life of the Order is established: a life in the fullest sense apostolic, in which preaching and teaching must proceed from an abundance of contemplation.

V. Made cooperators of the episcopal order by priestly ordination, we have as our special function the prophetic office by which the Gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed everywhere both by word and example, with due consideration for the conditions of persons, times, and places so that faith is awakened or penetrates more deeply all life in the building up of the body of Christ, which is perfected by the sacraments of faith.

VI. The structure of the Order as a religious society arises from its mission and fraternal communion. Since the ministry of the word and of the sacraments of faith is a priestly office, ours is a clerical Order, whose mission the cooperator brothers, exercising in a special way the common priesthood, also share in many ways. Moreover, the total commission of the Preachers to the proclamation of the

Gospel by word and work is revealed in the fact that by solemn profession they are entirely and perpetually united with the life and mission of Christ.

Since our Order in union with the entire Church has been sent to all nations, it has a universal character. In order that its mission may be fulfilled more suitably, it enjoys exemption, and is strengthened by a sound unity in its head, the Master of the Order, to whom all the brethren are bound immediately by profession since study and evangelization require mobility of everyone. From that same mission of the Order the personal responsibility and gifts of the brethren are affirmed and promoted in a special way. On the completion of his formation every brother is regarded as a mature adult, since he can instruct others and undertake various works in the Order. For this reason the Order maintains that its own laws do not bind under sin, so that the brethren may wisely embrace them "not like slaves under the law, but like freemen established under grace."⁶ Finally, by reason of the purpose of the Order, a superior has the faculty of dispensation "when it seems to him to be expedient, especially in those matters which seem to impede study, preaching, or the good of souls."⁽⁷⁾

VII. The communion and universality of our religious life shape its government as well. Its government is noted for an organic and balanced participation of all its members for pursuing the special end of the Order. For the Order is not restricted to a conventual fraternity even though this is its fundamental unit, but extends to the communion of convents which constitutes a province, and to the communion of provinces which constitutes it as a whole. For this reason its authority which is universal in its head, namely a General Chapter and the Master of the Order, is shared proportionately and with corresponding autonomy by the provinces and convents. Consequently our government is communitarian in a special way, for superiors ordinarily take office through election by the brethren and confirmation by a higher superior. Furthermore, through chapter and council, communities have a role in exercising their own government and in settling important matters.

This communitarian form of government is particularly suitable for the Order's development and frequent renewal. Superiors and the brethren through their delegates with equal right and freedom in General Chapters of provincials and of diffinitors, provide in common so that the Order's mission may be advanced and the Order itself be suitably renewed. This continual revision of the Order is necessary, not only on account of a spirit of perennial Christian conversion, but also on account of the special vocation of the Order which impels it to accommodate its presence in the world for each generation.

VIII. The fundamental purpose of the Order and the form of life flowing from it retain their value in every age of the Church. Nevertheless in times of greater change and evolution, as we are taught by our tradition, understanding and evaluation of these matters become particularly urgent. In these circumstances, it is characteristic of the Order to renew itself courageously and to adjust itself to these circumstances by discerning and testing what is good and useful in mankind's aspirations and by introducing the results into the unchangeable harmony of the fundamental elements of its life.

These elements, indeed, cannot be changed substantially among us, and they must continue to inspire forms of living and of preaching suited to the needs of the Church and of mankind.

IX. The Dominican family is composed of clerical and cooperator brothers, nuns, sisters, members of secular institutes, and fraternities of priests and laity. The Constitutions and Ordinations which follow concern only the brethren, unless it is expressly stated otherwise; by these regulations the necessary unity of the Order is protected without excluding a necessary diversity according to those same laws.

1 From the Good Friday prayer for catechumens

2 Honorius III: Letter to Dominic and his companions, 18 January 1221 (MOPH XXV, p.144)

3 Prologue of the Primitive Constitutions

4 Primitive Const. Dist. II, c.31

5 Honorius III: Letter to all Prelates of the Church, 4 February 1221 (MOPH XXV, p. 145)

6 Rule of St. Augustine, final paragraph.

7 Primitive Constitutions, Prologue.