

# Lay Dominican Formation Program Province of Saint Joseph

## Novitiate - Session 4 GOVERNMENT, SOURCE OF DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY

### Objectives:

1. This session will try to show how the historically unique and innovative form of government given to us by St. Dominic is the source from which flows the life of the Order and the graces of our individual vocations.
2. We will study the concept of Dominican obedience which liberates us to love God and serve our neighbor with the freedom of the children of God.

### Suggested Reading Material:

Dominican Spirituality, Hinnebusch, O.P. William, Ch. I, Ch. II,  
Pgs. 23 & 24

Dominican, History, Purpose, Spirituality, Weber, O.P.,  
Malatata, O.P., and Kiesling, O.P., pgs. 22-28

### Outline of Session

- I. Brief Review of Previous Session
- II. Introduction
- III. Historical Aspects of Government
  - A. Historically Innovative
  - B. Democratic
  - C. Dynamic vs. Static Participation
- IV. Dominican Obedience
  - A. Imitation of the Word
  - B. Free Response to Gospel
  - C. Source of Freedom

### I. Brief Review of Previous Session

In the last session on Rule and Statutes we saw how St. Dominic chose the Rule of St. Augustine and for what purpose. He did not wish his children burdened by a legalistic way of life which bound them under pain of sin, but one that would guide them to sanctity through joyful love and free

them for the task of preaching.

## **II. Introduction to this Session**

"In the manner that the Church is the People of God, so the Dominican Order is the totality of its members, who with their diversity of vocations and personal gifts make up the spiritual family of Dominic." The Dominican Order as founded by St. Dominic is a microcosm of the total Church.

Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we are given life, a participation in God's own life. This life (grace) flows to us and is increased in us through the Sacraments established by Christ and dispensed through the Church.

In the design of God, St. Dominic was given the grace to establish within the Church a special mission for the salvation and sanctification of souls through Preaching - this was none other than the mission of the Word.

As Christ distributes the grace of Sonship to us through the Church, so Dominic having by his life of faithfulness and obedience to God in imitation of the Word, earned for his Order and each individual within it the special grace of our vocation, continually distributes that grace to us through the government of the Order.

## **III. Historical Aspects**

The establishment of the Order of Preachers was historically innovative, not only in its combination of the Contemplative and Active, the Monastic and Apostolic, but in its governmental structure.

In Dominic's time, religious institutions of both men and women were hierarchical in their government. The community was gathered around an Abbot (or Abbess) who held office for life. The religious promised obedience to the person of the Abbot in a father/son relationship. Dominic rejected this Patriarchal form of government in favor of a Democratic one where the members of the community would elect one of their number to the office of Prior for a short term. This was a brother to brother, equal to equal relationship, where one brother was elected by the rest to an office of service. Dominic wished his followers to look at the office of Prior in the light of the Gospel, as a service. (See Matthew 20:20)

Each house of religious, or small community was to elect a number of their members to help the Prior govern, they in turn would elect and send representatives to a General Chapter and in turn elect from among them a Master of the Order who would bear the responsibility of guiding the Order to the fulfillment of its mission in the Church. This form of government assures the Order of a kind of perpetual youthfulness and growth and gives it a focal point of moral unity and source of authentic interpretation of the Constitutions. Fr. William Hinnebusch reminds us: "Everything positive in the Order's spiritual life traces back to St. Dominic, just as everything positive in the Church traces back to Christ. The present elements of Dominican Spirituality are either the manifest intention of St. Dominic or valid developments of his ideas and plans."

If we accept this, it is easy to see that like the Church, the Order can change this or that prescription of law (Rule and Constitutions) to grow with and meet the needs of each succeeding age while cherishing, preserving and being faithful to its heritage, its special charism.

Before we go on, perhaps it would be helpful to recall exactly what Dominican Spirituality is since we are trying to show how government is a source of that spirituality.

Dominican Spirituality, defined for us in the Postulancy Program, is composed of the end or purpose St. Dominic chose for the Order, namely, the salvation of souls through Preaching, and the means he gave to realize this end: prayer, study and community.

#### **IV. Dominican Obedience**

Obedience in our day is greatly misunderstood. Society, and sad to say, even some members of the Church, view obedience as servile, restrictive, subjugating and unpalatable; the act of passive, weak people. It is seen as taking something away from human dignity rather than restoring something to it.

The word obedience comes from the Latin phrase ob audiens meaning toward hearing .

This "hearing" means that we are "listening," that we are in a state of "attentiveness" to God. This "hearing" of God's Word awakens in us a response in knowledge and love. This is important to a Dominican's understanding of obedience. To be obedient is to strive ceaselessly to hear ever more clearly God's Word, the Gospel, Jesus Christ.

Dominican Spirituality enjoins us to obedience. How can a Dominican preach the Word without having first "listened" to it and responded to it in his own life? "Blest are you who hear the Word of God and keep it." (Luke 11:29)

As we have said before, the mission of Dominic, of the Order, is the mission of the Word Incarnate and we both pledge ourselves to it and fulfill it anew when we respond to God in knowledge and love with the words of Christ: "Behold, I come to do your will, O God."

To sum up, the government of the Order is life-giving. It is a channel of grace for us. Obedience to the Rule, a superior, or of a community presupposes that God's Word is discerned in the command; and the obedience to it actualizes, in a particular situation, obedience to God's Word,

It is important for us to learn early on in our vocation that our participation in the life of the Order is dynamic not static. We must constantly be at the service of the Order which in turn provides our nourishment.

Although we may be tempted to concern ourselves only with our own local chapter, we must remember that the graces St. Dominic wishes us to have come to us through the Orders-government, from the Master of the Order to the Provincial, the Provincial Promoter and Provincial Council, the Regional Council and finally to the Chapter Council. If we fail to see the importance of these channels of government by not participating actively in them, we are cutting ourselves off from the life of the Dominican family.