

# FREEDOM

## Our founding vision

Freedom is an essential element of our founding vision. It has been a characteristic of the Institute from the very beginning and continues to be part of its tradition. In a nutshell, freedom, as Fr. Barre understood it, is freedom from structures in order to be free for God and mission, based on pure love.

## Fr. Barre's spirit of freedom

The strength of Fr. Barre's spirit of freedom is evident in his determined refusal to compromise on any issue which conflicted with his faith in God's unconditional love for us and our total response to that love. Often during his era, he found himself confronted by different schools of thought, be they with regard to the spiritual or the material, and the freedom with which he took up his position instead of locking himself into one camp or the other is admirable.

His spirit of freedom is easily detected in his constant and recurring use of terms such as disinterestedness, detachment, abandonment, Divine Providence. In Fr. Barre's vocabulary:

**'disinterestedness'** is not indifference, but freedom from self-interest, a self-emptying where Jesus Himself becomes our security, a going out of ourselves that enables us to recognise the dignity of the other in our mission;

**'detachment'** is freedom from undue attachment to worldly goods, persons, power, wealth, privilege, success, people's expectations of us, and even with regard to works undertaken — an ability to **let** go, prompted by love of God and mission;

his **'abandonment'** is strongly underlined by his freedom from fear and insecurity because of his unwavering faith in God's love and complete trust in **'Divine Providence'**.

Fr. Barre's texts contain an abundance of strongly-stated references to disinterestedness, trust in Divine Providence, abandonment, detachment -- all richly nourished by the teachings of Jesus - for example: "The spirit of the Institute ... is based completely on abandonment and total detachment" (FM 4), and "We have to live in a spirit of complete abandonment to the desires of God and of Jesus." (FM 13) For Fr. Barre, it was a question of spirit.

The apostolic spirit which Fr. Barre always kept in mind is a spirit of disinterestedness and detachment: "The spirit of the Institute draws its strength from disinterestedness, love of neighbour, pure desire to work for the salvation of one's neighbour, together with self-abandonment to Divine Providence. This strengthens the Sisters' vocation and keeps them firm and constant in their zeal." (RE 4)

## **Freedom from structures**

The fundamental principle of Fr. Barre's spirituality imparted to the Sisters from the beginning was absolute abandonment to Divine Providence. This calls for detachment from all things (even to the point of unconcern for one's future) and freedom from structures in order to be free for God and for one's neighbour. The Institute would have neither vows nor cloister, and teaching or other apostolic works would be entirely free of charge. The Sisters were to be completely detached from all forms of profit. According to their rule, they were never to accept anything from persons whose children they instructed.

Fr. Barre was adamant that the Institute remained free from any endowment. In his time, the system of 'endowment' was very much in vogue. For any social undertaking (to serve the elderly, the sick, or to establish a school for underprivileged children, etc.), the first step was to seek the assurance of an endowment. A rich person put some capital in the bank. Every year this capital had to realize the money necessary to keep a work going. Endowment could also take the form of a piece of land or a farm which was given in such a way that its produce supplied the money needed for the project. Endowment usually came with some form of control by the benefactor.

Fr. Bane had his reasons for not accepting endowments:

"It is better for the school to last only ten to fifteen years without endowment, keeping alive their initial zeal, than to last longer and become lax as has happened in so many other institutes that promise security." (RE 5)

If one has a house supported by endowments, it would no longer be possible to enjoy the freedom of moving out of a neighbourhood or parish. Experience has shown that this freedom is sometimes necessary." (RE 11)

It is possible to found works on a resource that comes from man, a property, a capital, a revenue. But the day when that resource fails, all will crumble. Besides, Fr. Barre did not believe in it. On the contrary, it is possible to found works on faith and to abandon them to God, and then to be sure that they will endure always because God is faithful. That was Fr. Barre's choice. In Fr. Barre's belief, we are free as long as we remain in God's hands.

He would not compromise on his convictions. A month before his death, his Provincial and Superior-General pressed him to accept 'foundations' for his schools. He answered:

"It is better to fall into the hands of God without a financially secure establishment than to fall into the hands of men, thanks to an endowment." (Positio, p. 315)

## **Freedom for mission**

In order to establish the reign of Jesus Christ in all hearts, we need to be led by the spirit of Jesus who is a spirit of freedom. For a more effective service in mission, Fr. Bane wants us to be free.

There is only one security in which Fr. Bane wants us to be anchored: the certainty of being loved by God with an excessive love. Here is found the source of that freedom on which he founded the Institute.

Fr. Barre's spirit of freedom calls for purity of intention and motivation, clarity of purpose and direction. It is of primary importance to Fr. Bane that his Sisters have freedom for their apostolic mission, for genuine authentic relationships in every aspect of their life and ministry, freedom to respond to God's call and love, to respond to the needs of the people with availability and flexibility.

### **How can this spirit of freedom be lived today?**

We find the answer in our Book of the Institute: In living out this mission, we are animated by 'pure love'. This gift of God enables us to love Him and all people with complete disinterestedness. Being free with regard to persons and places, money and success and even with regard to works undertaken. we place our trust in God. assured of His love: not worrying of about what will become of us one day. Our belonging to the Institute is founded on no other security and calls for a spirit of abandonment and total detachment." (BI, #6)

Our deepest freedom is to choose what resonates with the core of our being, knowing that all our choices impact on the lives of others. Choosing is more than hovering between alternatives; it is about opening up new possibilities by making creative and courteous choices.

When routine and internal organisation replace vision, when fidelity to our works prevents us from addressing new needs that arise in our society, we are no longer free. Hence the challenge to us is to push out the boundaries ('to widen the space of our tent'), to let go of our fears and let the Spirit take over. The difficulty of letting go and moving on to areas of greater need will always remain a challenge. To move freely, one has to be deeply rooted, otherwise there is the risk of being crippled by fear. Rootedness in the Spirit of God enables us to believe in the life-giving, energising power of the Spirit so that we can transcend our fear and take the risk to embrace the new, in the firm belief that God is with us and continues to lead us. It is only within a deep, reflective and nourished spirituality that we can foster this openness and freedom, which is part of our heritage and forms the basis of who we are.

The challenge for us today is: How free are we to give God the freedom to lead us?

'No feather borne hither and thither upon the wind Moves with such grace and freedom

As do they who allow themselves To be carried by God Without resisting' (SC 37)