

## PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL IN THE ORDER OF PREACHERS (THE DOMINICANS)

Brother Carlos A. Azpiroz Costa, OP

Rome, 7 November 2002

Feast of All the Saints of the Order

The Order of Preachers (the Dominicans) "was founded, from the beginning, especially for preaching and the salvation of souls ". Because of this, we, the sons and daughters of Saint Dominic, offer ourselves in a new way to the universal Church, dedicating ourselves entirely to the complete evangelization Word of God to all men and women, groups and communities, believers and non-believers and especially the poor . We are conscious that history and the world of humanity are the places where salvation is achieved. Because of this, attentive to the dynamism of modern society, we insist on the necessity of establishing our preaching on the new experiences and realities that contemporary men and women daily bring to the Christian faith. Reading the Acts of the most recent General Chapters, we can sketch the new "Areopagus" or "frontiers" to which we are called; which are priorities for the Order and how we can portray our proclamation of the Gospel.

### I. THE MISSION OF THE ORDER FROM ITS ORIGINS: "MISSION WITHOUT FRONTIERS"

The emphasis on the missionary and evangelizing character of the Church in Vatican II, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - which Brother Damian Byrne called the "Carta Magna of the preacher" - makes singularly clear the foundational project of Dominic. It is the responsibility of the whole Dominican Family, "men and women together in mission," to realize that project and to set in motion the specific mission of the Order in the world. Some features that have characterized the Dominican mission from the beginning are:

The mission of the Order was and must continue to be a mission beyond frontiers. This mission, situated at the - as fr. Pierre Claverie OP, bishop of Oran in Algeria, called them, "lignes de fracture" of humanity, which go across our globalized world so often marked by injustice and the violence of racial, social and religious conflicts. It demanded and demands of the Dominican community the attitude and practice of itinerancy, mobility, the continuous displacement towards the new frontiers to which the priorities of our mission guide us.

### II. THE FRONTIERS ON WHICH WE ARE CALLED TO EVANGELIZE:

#### 1. The frontier between life and death:

The great challenge of justice and peace in the world

The most dramatic and urgent problems that confront contemporary men and women are of a historical character. They deal with the systems, structures, social practices, politics and economies that put a great mass of people between life and death. So, the dedication

to justice and peace - analysis, reflection and actions of solidarity - is a criterion of the validation of any Dominican mission, and must accompany any sphere or modality of our preaching. The example of Bartolomé de las Casas, Antonio de Montesinos and Pedro de Córdoba in Latin America, like the example of Domingo de Salazar in the east and the works of Brother Louis Joseph Lebret in our time are illuminating.

## 2. The frontier between humanity and inhumanity:

The great challenge of the emarginated

The marginalizing structure of today's society produces an ever-increasing number of emarginated men and women, who come close to the frontier of an inhuman or sub-human life. Among the categories of emarginated can be found many peoples that suffer from material poverty and a cultural, social, economic and political marginalization. There are still today, in various forms, victims of "apartheid": emigrants, dissidents, workers, women, the sick, the young, the old. These are manifest signs of the absence of the reign of God, and as such, a challenge that takes priority in our reflection, study and evangelization. The mission of the Dominican community is to inaugurate and show a new model of communion and participation among all men and women.

## 3. The Christian frontier:

The challenge of the universal religions

The universal religious traditions give us the experience of God. Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Islam are situated nevertheless, beyond the frontier of the Christian experience of God. Some of these religious traditions exert a strong influence on contemporary men and women. The dialogue with other religions brings into question the traditional conceptions of the evangelizing mission of the Church as well as inauthentic attitudes and models of evangelization. The dialogue must be at once analytical and self-critical; this presupposes a listening attitude and an inculturated presence, free of any hint of colonialism, imperialism or fanaticism. Dominic's ideal was to be in mission beyond the frontiers of established Christianity, among the Cumbans (this was his dream). The placing of convents in cities and the presence of the friars in universities for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue give priority to this challenge of Dominican evangelization.

## 4. The frontier of religious experience:

The challenge of secular ideologies

Contemporary men and women find themselves in a deeply paradoxical situation: there is a lack of religion and a yearning for the religious. Secular ideologies explain, in part, this lack and question the old models of the transmission of Christ's message. Many of these questions, planted by contemporary thought, remain to be answered. Present in all of these is the interrogative about the person and his or her future and the critical question about the truth. Atheism, unbelief, secularization, indifference and laicism are questions that deal strongly with these ideologies. Dialogue on these very subjects can serve as a critical corrective to the varied manifestations of religious and Christian actions and, at the same time, suggest a priority area of Dominican evangelization. An important lesson from the origins of Dominican history has been the capacity of the Order to establish a dialogue between Christ's message and both classical and emerging cultures. Some examples are: Saint Dominic, who incorporated study in his foundational project:

Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century; the Dominican professors and theologians of the 16th century; the Dominican theologians at Vatican II. Theology has been creative and prophetic in the Dominican Family in so far as it has been allowed to be clarified by cultural coordinates. It has been life-giving in the measure that it has taken as its point of departure the pressing quæstiones disputatæ of each time.

#### 5. The frontier of the Church:

The challenge of the non-Catholic confessions and other religious movements

The plurality of confessions is a scandal for believers and non-believers. The hidden riches in the diverse Christian traditions are an invitation to ecumenical dialogue and reconciliation. The theological reflection of the Order, faithful to its tradition, addresses this challenge. With other overtones, the frontier of the Church also goes to the phenomenon of the "new religious options". In certain countries and regions of the world, the growing presence of these "movements" constitutes a challenge for evangelization. Simple denunciation and anathemas are insufficient. The first ideal of Dominic was to be in mission beyond the frontiers of "Christianity". The immediate needs of the Church impeded him, and he carried out his mission among heretics, in the frontiers of the Church. From them he learned and took models of the evangelical and apostolic life. With them, he was in dialogue without rest. He questioned them with his witness and fidelity to the communion of the Church.

### III. PRIORITIES OF THE ORDER THAT CORRESPOND TO THESE FRONTIERS:

The Order of Preachers, which participates in the Apostolic Life of the Church, must be always in mission and position itself on the frontiers. The highest priority of all for us is preaching, "dedicating ourselves entirely to the complete evangelization of the Word of God". To realize this end, the Order has reaffirmed four priorities in recent years. These priorities can not be separated one from the other nor can one be emphasized while diminishing the importance of the others; on the contrary, they are complementary; each one responds in a different way to the more pressing needs of contemporary peoples with regard to preaching the Word of God. Neither are they new, but belong wholly to the charism and tradition of the Order: in the life of Saint Dominic, in the life of the brothers of the 13th century, in the life of the brothers of the 16th century who arrived in Latin America and the Far East, in the modern epoch. The four priorities are certainly the fruit of our original grace. They are:

1. Catechesis in a dechristianized world: the world of those who grew up in the context of a Christian tradition, but in fact live on the fringes or outside; indifferent or hostile to the visible community of believers. This catechesis should be Pascal, to call people to a personal conversion and bring about the transformation of the world; also, it should promote lay ministries.

2. Evangelization in the context of diverse cultures: oriented towards a philosophical and theological investigation of cultures, intellectual systems, social movements and religious traditions operative "outside of historical Christianity". The Order is called to help to give

birth to a new way to be Christian on the various continents. The local communities must identify with the people in a positive attitude of dialogue and appreciation of their cultural values.

3. Justice and Peace: critical analysis of the origins, forms and structures of injustice in contemporary societies; evangelical praxis for the liberation and promotion of the whole person. Actions for Justice and Peace, that they may be prophetic signs in the world, need to be integrated into projects of local, provincial or regional communities; they must be based in social analysis and biblical and theological sources; they must support the brothers and sisters who participate at the risk of their lives in associations and movements in favor of human dignity.

4. Human communication through mass media: in the preaching of the Word of God. The media has very evidently shown us "the drama of our times": the fracture between human culture and the evangelical message, between the human word and the word of faith (Evangelii Nuntiandi 20); the media today constitutes a privileged instrument to provide a culturally intelligible and effective word to the efficacious proclamation of the whole Gospel. Immersed in a world in which the whole person is communicative of life or death. This occurs in a process in which there are no spectators; all are actors; the vocation of the Order calls us, then, to be preachers, that is, communicators with these characteristics: conviction, new vision, liberty.

#### IV. CHARACTERISTICS OF PREACHING AND ATTITUDES OF THE PREACHER

Evangelization in these frontiers and in accord with these priorities has certain characteristics and requires some personal and communitarian attitudes :

##### 1. THEOLOGICAL Preaching

This implies a total openness to the whole truth, wherever it is to be found. It demands a profound reflection and disposition for dialogue (ecumenical, inter religious and cultural). Our preaching has always been rooted in a profound and scientific study of theology. "Our study must be directed principally, ardently and diligently to this: that we can be useful to the souls of our neighbors." Since then our study has been intimately related to the apostolic mission of preaching of the Order. To dedicate ourselves to study is to respond to a call to "cultivate the human search for the truth". Saint Dominic encouraged his friars to be useful to souls through an intellectual compassion, to share with them *misericordia veritatis*, the mercy of the truth. The crisis of today's world, the scandal of growing poverty and injustice, confrontation of different cultures, contact with dechristianized peoples; all of this is a challenge for us. Our practice of theological reflection must prepare us to penetrate profoundly into the significance of these subjects in the mystery of Divine Providence. Contemplation and theological reflection give us the capacity to seek ways more suited for today's preaching of the Gospel. This is the true path we follow so that our preaching be doctrinally true, and not an abstract, intellectual exposition of some system.

##### 2. COMPASSIONATE Preaching

This demands an attitude of profound compassion for people, especially for those who find themselves "distant". Only compassion can cure our blindness and make it possible that we see the signs of the times. 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. Compassion and humility come only from a profound union with God in Christ. We are united to God when we imitate the compassion and humble service of Christ. Compassion and humility are fountains from which emanate the knowledge of the signs of the times, pervading prayer and contemplation. This is how we contemplate God, who has revealed himself to us through Sacred Scripture and who manifests his will in the signs of the times.

### 3. INCULTURATED AND INCARNATED Preaching

This demands a profound sensibility to the diverse visions of reality that other religions, cultures and philosophies (incarnation and inculturation) have. It implies an education in order to know how to hope, to learn, to come to conversion, to be part, integrate and help to purify and elevate that which we find in these religions, cultures and philosophies.

### 4. PROPHETIC Preaching

It is the proclamation not of our own knowledge, but of the Word of God, living and life-giving, integral pronouncement of the revealed Gospel that contains words of eternal life. It is not possible to omit the serious analysis of the "signs of the times", which proceeds from supernatural principles and is illuminated through prayer. To discern the signs of the times, we must attend diligently to the cry of the poor, the oppressed, the emarginated and the tortured, and all those who, because of race, religion and denouncing injustice, suffer persecution. God talks to us through these cries and also through the silence of those who have no voice and live in apathy, loneliness and depression.

### 5. Preaching IN POVERTY

Poverty is not only a form of self-denial, but also a testament and appropriate means that lends credibility to our preaching; it is a sign of its authority and sincerity. We live in a world that augments the division between the rich and the poor - as much in rich and poor nations as in rich and poor groups and people. Moreover, the poor today have a better knowledge of national and international structures that are the cause of this state of servility and poverty. If in a world such as this we were to present ourselves as living more with the rich than with the poor, our preaching would not be credible.

### 6. ITINERANT Preaching

We are men and women in journey. Itinerancy is, in the first place, a spatial concept that implies a disposition to go on journey, to travel; but our preaching asks of us a social, cultural, ideological and economic itinerancy. It is an aspect of Dominican spirituality that must inform the whole of our lives and that is nurtured from diverse biblical experiences from the Hebrew Scriptures as well as those of Jesus, "The Way" whom Dominic longed to follow as a true evangelical son.

### 7. COMMUNITARIAN Preaching

Our preaching is not the solitary effort of isolated individuals. And so, it demands a disposition to collaborate, to work in groups, to support the efforts of others with a demonstrated interest, vivaciousness and effective aid. These attitudes have their roots in the essential elements of our Dominican life: the common life, contemplative prayer, assiduous study, a fraternal community and consecration through our vows. The communion and universality of the Order also inform its government in which are exceptional the organic and proportioned participation of all of the parts to attain the correct ends of the Order. It is a communitarian government in its way and is certainly appropriate for the promotion of the Order and its frequent revision.

#### 8. SHARED Preaching: THE DOMINICAN FAMILY

The Order was born as a Family. Friars, contemplative nuns, sisters, members of secular institutes and lay and clerical fraternities and other groups in some manner associated with the Order (among these: Dominican Youth Movement - IDYM ; Dominican Volunteers International - DVI ) inspire us in the charism of Dominic. This charism is one and indivisible: the grace of preaching. It is a shared preaching with our brothers and sisters of the Order who through their baptism live the same common priesthood and who are consecrated through the same religious profession and through their promise to the same mission. Our global identity is better manifested through our collaboration with one another. This collaboration includes: praying together, planning, making decisions and completing projects from a mutual complementarity that respects equality. These projects include very diverse themes such as ministries of prayer, teaching, preaching, pastoral animation, justice and peace, the mass media, investigations and publications, as well as promotion of vocations and formation.

Conclusion: These frontiers, priorities and characteristics of our proclamation of the Gospel are not "new tasks" that are added to others like a kind of "categorical imperative" or "new way" that excludes others of yesterday. On the contrary, they express a path of joy and freedom; they express the vocation of many men and women that have given and give their lives making their own the words of the Apostle:

" Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9, 16)

Rome, 7 November 2002

Feast of All the Saints of the Order