

Rediscovering Our Dominican Charism for Today

I. THE MISSION OF THE DOMINICAN ORDER IN ASIA*

1. *The Challenge of Inculturation*

At the Synod on Evangelization in 1974 — two concerns were expressed — the first was the failure of many, including missionaries, to speak about Jesus as the centre of evangelization — the second — a failure to speak to Jesus as the principle of all authentic apostolic work.¹

These concerns were a reflection of the growing malaise which affected the work of evangelization — particularly in parts of Asia where progress was slow and difficult and of the spread of the theory that peoples of other religions could find salvation through their own religions which supported the view that there was no need to evangelize. It was a reflection of “the apathy and lack of joy and hope in many evangelizers” mentioned by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, No. 80.

With sympathetic understanding of the difficulties confronting evangelizers Paul VI, nevertheless, firmly restated that “the church

* This paper presupposes what Fr. Felicísimo Martínez has already said about the Mission of the Order on the Frontiers and the Ministry of Preaching. Each is an element in the mission of the Order in Asia today. I confine myself to a reflection on the challenge of inculturation, poverty and riches and the challenge of the Sects.

¹ Bede McGregor, *Commentary on Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in *Evangelization Today*, Dominican Publications, Dublin, 1977, p. 58.

exists to preach the Gospel..." EN 14. "We wish to affirm once more that the essential mission of the Church is to evangelize all men" and that "there is no true evangelization, if the name, the teaching, life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed" EN 14.

In 1970 Paul VI addressed a similar message to Dominicans in which he said: "The Dominican Order would undoubtedly sin against itself if it turned aside from its missionary duty".²

Today as we celebrate 400 years, and recall the heroism of the pioneers of evangelization in Asia — we too need to renew the conviction that we are missionaries. Like so many others we need to examine, and rethink our missionary thrust. We need to question ourselves and ask — how many of us in our congregations, provinces and vicariates, are involved in direct evangelization?

Like so many others, the difficulty of evangelization in Asia can easily divert us into work that is only marginally evangelical but offers work and economic security. This is hardest for the men. We can so easily become entrapped in work such as running kindergartens and even certain types of school administration which rob us of the best of our time, our energies and talents. We are diverted from the direct proclamation of the Gospel, failing to remember that "there is no true evangelization, if the name, the teaching, life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus... are not proclaimed."

We need the courage to examine the whole field of direct evangelization, a field in which many of the sects excel us. To do so, we need help. We need the help of those qualified in *comparative religion, cultural anthropology, social psychology*... in devising new methods of evangelization. Just as Las Casas and the Dominicans working in Central America appealed to Vitoria and Salamanca for help, so today we need the assistance of those proficient in certain skills to help us fashion missionary methods suited for today. If we do not have this expertise among ourselves — let us seek it from others — in the Church or the secular world. The complexity of the work of evangelization today makes such help imperative.

² Paul VI, *Letter to the Master General on the Occasion of the Eighth Centenary of the Birth of St. Dominic*, 1970.

Today we celebrate 400 years. We take inspiration from the heroism of the early pioneers of the missions in Asia, the hardships they endured, their commitment to peaceful evangelization, their fight for justice, the condemnation of slavery, the denunciation of greed, the insistence of men like Domingo de Salazar that those who had been enslaved should receive restitution, their commitment to learning. We take inspiration from all this. We celebrate these men.

But we are also aware that, today, we cannot work in precisely the same ways, for "the methods of evangelization change according to the times, the places and the prevailing cultures and accordingly they present... a challenge to our ability to discern them and adapt them" EN 40.

Addressing the Bishops in Taiwan, John Paul II urged them "to seek out new missionary methods", appropriate to the needs of evangelization today. I believe that the future of evangelization in Asia will depend on the seriousness with which the Church accepts this challenge. The Dominican Family should play a part in this search. It is a Dominican challenge.

Today Asia is home to 6 out of 10 people in the world. While the Church has been present in parts of Asia from Apostolic times and in many other areas since the 16th century, the common Asia experience, with the exception of the Philippines, is that the Church has had very limited success in penetrating Asian society.

In Asia, Catholics account for only 2.4% of the population³. Why such limited success? There is no simple, no single answer. The continuing strength of the great Asian religions has certainly played a part but equally significant perhaps has been the way in which we have proclaimed Christ.

Reflecting on the way in which Christianity had been spread in India — Sadhu Sundar Singh, a convert from Sikhism, said: "We have taught Christianity out of a western cup when we should have

³ Percentage of Catholics

India	Indonesia	S. Korea	Japan	Pakistan	Philippines	Taiwan
1.7%	2.7	2.9	0.3	0.6	80%	2.8
Vietnam						
7.3						

taught it out of an eastern bowl." He was merely restating in the 20th century the concern expressed by Propaganda Fidei in an instruction to the Vicars Apostolic in China in 1659, which stated:

Do not regard it as your task and do not bring any pressure to bear on the people, to change their manners, customs and uses... what could be more absurd than to transport France, Spain, Italy or some other European country to China? Do not introduce all that to them, but only the faith.⁴

Today in many Asian countries, Christianity is seen as the intrusion of an alien culture. As Bede Griffiths has written: "In liturgy, theology and organization Christianity wears western clothes."

Speaking at Kampala in Africa in 1969 Paul VI said: "You can have, and ought to have an African Christianity." John Paul II reiterated the same message in his Radio Address to Asia during his visit to the Philippines. "Wherever she is, the Church must sink her roots deeply into the spiritual and cultural soil of the country, assimilate all genuine values, enriching them also with the insights that she received from Jesus Christ..."

This is one of the challenges we face in Asia today.

Recently, travelling from Calcutta by train, I got into conversation with a man in the compartment. A Hindu and a geologist by profession, he began to explain what his religion meant to him. He spoke of some of the great figures of modern Hinduism and their experience of God. When he had finished he turned to me and asked: "Have you ever seen Jesus?" I said: "No, no, I have never seen Jesus". He was visibly disappointed and he returned to his corner by the window. After about twenty minutes he turned and asked: "Have you ever had an experience of Jesus?" To many of us such questions may seem bizarre, or border on the ridiculous, but for many Asian peoples the experiential assumes great importance.

What many people are looking for, from us, is a share in our own personal experience of God. In the Gospel Our Lord tells us:

⁴ Text is found in Stephen Neill's, *History of the Christian Missions* p. 179.

"You will be witnesses of me". But what does this mean? The phrase — "We are witnesses" literally means offering an experience of Christ who is alive — one whom it is possible to contact. Reflecting on this in one of her talks Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "We need the conviction that we belong to Jesus. People ought to be able to see Christ in us".

Furthermore, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* reminds us that: "The proclamation of the word is above all by witness". But that witness must be given within a certain culture. This imposes upon us not only an obligation to know the language of a people but the necessity of trying to understand the code of symbols (signs) which a culture possesses and which are the vehicles for communicating its deepest experiences of the divine (God), the human (man), the secular (world). What is a sign and symbol of holiness in one culture may have no such significance in another culture.

In a talk to the Second Asian Monastic Conference, Bishop Patrick D'Souza shared the following:

"I was in a school teaching boys, a school that had 60 Catholics and over a thousand non-Christians. Like any priest who works hard in a school I was loved by the children. My room was like a club and I was helping them as any priest would do, I even printed a book of morning and evening prayers. I was thinking that I was to them a sign of Christ united to God. Then one day I came to know that thirteen boys among those whom I cared most for, those who came to me with their most intimate problems, were going to a Hindu guru, — as they said, "To sit with God." They came to me to learn, they came to me with their moral problems. They came to me for encouragement. Though they knew that I read something from a prayerbook called a breviary and I said Mass in the morning, still when they wanted to sit with God, they went to a Hindu Guru. This has been one of the greatest experiences of my life that I was not to them a sign of God living in us... the sorrow of not being able to be a sign of God living in our midst."

If the proclamation of the word is above all by witness, then that witness, to be meaningful must be given within the culture

of the people to be evangelized. In the past we didn't always succeed in sharing our experience of God in a meaningful way with others. We shared the faith in the only way we knew how — according to our own experience and clothed in our own culture. But today, the church is emphatic in urging inculturation. Everywhere he goes in Asia the Holy Father speaks about "the challenge of inculturation."

I would like to share some thoughts on one aspect of inculturation which is less written about, less talked about, and perhaps less divisive than others. It concerns the way in which we communicate the faith to others.

"Faith is a response made to an offer made by God." But faith, its celebration, and its practice have their expression in a given culture, history and destiny. So faith is lived, clothed, enveloped, expressed in a culture. Inculturation is to plant the seed of the faith in a culture and allow it to bloom, to express itself according to the resources and genius of that culture.⁵

Each one has his/her own touch on God and God touches each one in his own way. While this is so, it is likewise true that many cultures have their own distinctive window on God — a way of approaching God that tends to be instinctive to a people and is widely though not exclusively found among them. This should cause us no surprise as our initial prayer life has its roots in our early socialization. It is woven into the very transmission of culture.

To begin at the end. We should be able to speak to this experience of God in others and assist them through that experience, and empowered by the gift of faith, to receive the fulness of the Word.

The pursuit of the Divine, whether fully realized or not, takes many forms. Nevertheless most can be gathered under one or other of three paths.

(1) *The Path of Transcendence.* The first path is The Path of Transcendence. It brings an awareness of the Otherness of God.

⁵ Yves Congar, *Christianity as Faith and as Culture from Evangelizzazione e Cultura*. Congresso Internazionale di Missiologia, 1975, Pp. 1 & 4.

In Genesis 17:1 Yahweh reveals himself to Abraham as the "Mountain God" — "I am El Shaddai". Jesus taught us to address God as Father, but a Father who is in heaven, and much of our Christian art and architecture emphasizes transcendence. The steeping of the hands in prayer, the names of some of the classics of Christian literature, 'The Cloud of Unknowing' and 'The Ascent of Mount Carmel', affirm it. It is the common heritage of Judaism, Christianity and main-stream Islam. But it is not an exclusively western path, for "classic Chinese thought also presents Heaven as the supreme power or the divine being who presides over the destiny of the universe."⁷

(2) *The Path of Immanence.* Secondly there is the path of Immanence. This path opens us to an awareness of God in creation, in the hundreds of ways he is present about us — in others too. It is a path commonly found among animists and tribal peoples. For us Francis of Assisi characterizes this path.

(3) *The Journey Within.* Thirdly, there is the journey within. We take this path by turning within ourselves. It is the Path of the indwelling, a turning towards the centre and the discovery of God's presence dwelling in the cave of the heart. It is the way of Catherine of Siena — the Cell of Self-Knowledge. In the east the statues of the Buddha characterize this path. He is never shown with his face turned towards heaven as are the statues of many Christian saints. His is the path of interiority. "It is the privileged way of the Indian yogi, Taoist meditation and Zen Buddhism."⁸

These three paths point in the direction of transcendence, immanence and interiority. They are part of our Christian tradition and one or other will tend to predominate in our lives. What is distinctive in the East is that they are cultivated in a different way. Asian cultures have created their own methods of pursuing transcendence, immanence and particularly interiority. Furthermore, they do not always, apparently, achieve a meeting with the Divine. The vision in Chandogya Upanishad 8:1 is not always realized or apparently foreseen.

⁷ Yves Raguin, *Ways of Contemplation East and West*, in *Asian Religious Traditions and Christianity*, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, 1983 p. 15.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

In the centre of the castle of Brahman our own body, there is a small shrine in the form of a small lotus flower and within can be found a small space. We should find who dwells there and we shall want to know Him.⁹

Many of the methods which cultivate interiority do not appear to achieve this. Yet who can say that they do not speak of a yearning beyond self whether this is actually conceived or realized, in the same way as Justin Martyr (died 167) spoke of a "seed of the Logos" dwelling in the hearts of the Greek philosophers before the Word became incarnate among them?

Yet some methods which cultivate interiority do seem to end in a contemplation of self-realization. This is at times so profound, so absorbing, that it may become an obstacle and inhibit the leap to the Divine. One falls in love with the beauty that is one-self. At times, in a confusion of identity, it may lead to a form of self-divinization. St. Thomas suggests that the folly of the fallen angels was that they fell in love with their own beauty to the exclusion of God, a hazard common to all religions.

In Gnanananda, Swami Abhishiktananda weds the eastern and western pursuit of interiority when he says:

Man's primary task is to penetrate within and there discover himself. Whoever has not found God, whoever has not found God within himself has not yet found himself. No one finds himself apart from God, and no one finds God apart from himself. God is he who is at the heart of all, at the origin even of the utterance of that 'Thou' with which I address him.¹⁰

Conscious of their limitations, a Christian may use Yoga and Zen as methods of interiorization without compromising the faith once he realizes that a time comes "when one has to orient oneself according to faith and according to the action of God's wisdom and grace."¹¹ The question is — should we?

In "Redemptor Hominis", John Paul II wrote: "The missionary attitude always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for what is

⁹ Chandogya Upanishad 8:1.

¹⁰ Abhishiktananda, *Guru and Disciple*, London, SPCK, 1974.

¹¹ Raguin, *Op. Cit.*, p. 18-19.

in man, for what man has himself worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which 'blows where it wills'. The mission is never destruction."¹²

Ignatius Puthiadam, in an article entitled "Inculturation and Spirituality",¹³ says: "The real problem... we face in Asia is the loss of our own identity. The basic fact the history of the Christian missions in Asia has forgotten is that Christianity must be incarnate."

In terms of prayer we have been content to share our own experience of God, our own path. It is natural that we should feel more at home with prayer forms we have grown up with. They are trusted and loved. It asks for a profound incarnation to speak to people of God in terms of their own path of interiority, immanence or transcendence. Our message is coated in alien clothes.

It has been said: "A prophet becomes a false prophet not so much because of the non-genuineness of his message (it may have come from God), but because of its non-contextuality, i.e. it was not meant for that context."¹⁴ Has not this, perhaps, been one of our mistakes in Asia? We have been content to teach Christianity "out of a western cup instead of an eastern bowl". We have ignored the work of the Spirit as he leads his people along their own path of interiority, immanence or transcendence.

Our Asian Bishops Conference, meeting in Calcutta in 1978, appealed in the strongest terms for a life of prayer built on the culture of the people.

The Prayer-life of our churches should 'take over the riches of our nations, which have been given to Christ as an inheritance,' especially those ways of prayer which have been developed by the native genius of our people and have played an important and honoured role in shaping the traditions of our lands.

¹² John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* No. 12.

¹³ Ignatius Puthiadam, *Inculturation and Spirituality*, in *Inculturation in Seminary Formation*, Indore, 1980 p. 79.

¹⁴ Samuel Amitham, *The Church the Bearer of Salvation*, in *Living Theology in Asia*, Orbis Books, p. 204.

The Spirit is leading the Churches of Asia to integrate into the treasury of our Christian heritage all that is best in our traditional ways of prayer and worship.

Asia has much to give to authentic Christian spirituality,— a richly developed prayer of the whole human person in unity of body-psyche-spirit; prayer of deep interiority and immanence; traditions of asceticism and renunciation; simplified prayer forms and other popular expressions of faith and piety of those whose hearts and minds so readily turn to God in their daily lives. This is Asian's gift of prayer to the Church.¹⁵

It is a challenge to step beyond our inherited prayer tradition, very often the gift and heritage of another culture, and to enrich it by all that is best in the traditional ways of prayer and worship among our peoples. For some, perhaps for most Christian communities in Asia, their prayer life is the gift of another culture and so they do not share that window on God which is the gift of their own people. It is difficult to see that the spiritual life would not be enriched by such a process. But it does demand effort—it is after all a new form of incarnation.

Apart from the enrichment of the spiritual life—there is the apostolic dimension. We should be able to speak to people about God in terms of their own experience and help them to complete that journey in Christ. This is what the Church is urging us to do.

Is it not perhaps a partial explanation of the failure of the Church in Asia, that we have not been able, or not even thought to speak to people in terms of their own yearning for God—however imperfect that may be, and lead them through that experience to receive the fulness of the word?

It is interesting to note that religious women are seen as having a special role to play in this process. Their creative role is recognized in the document on: *"The Role of Women in Evangelization."*

...the life of prayer should be built as far as possible on the culture and on all that is good in the traditional

¹⁵ Briefer Version of Final Statement No. 8.

religious customs of the people who are being evangelized. Silence and contemplation, to which women are providentially suited, should nourish that prayer *so that prayer* will issue in liturgies and paraliturgies which are truly expressive for the people concerned.¹⁶

Reflecting on the role played by Dominicans in the liturgical renewal in France and indeed in the whole Church, Fr. M.D. Chenu says: "the renewal in France was undertaken by Dominicans... we Dominicans wanted a liturgy that would be pastoral..."¹⁷ In Asia, might not Dominicans, both men and women, have something to contribute in evolving new "liturgies and paraliturgies which are truly expressive" for our peoples?

The mind of the Church is clear. We are urged to build our prayer life as far as possible on the culture of the people to be evangelized. Is such a form of inculturation a matter of choice or ought it not to be an integral part of formation for mission in Asia today?

It would be difficult to conceive of a mission to Asia today without accepting the challenge of inculturation.

In speaking about the way in which we communicate the faith and inculturation, I am conscious that such topics do not have the same urgency in the Philippines as elsewhere in Asia. But if you are to assume a similar role in evangelization—as the pioneer missionaries, whom we celebrate during these days—it would be difficult to conceive of a mission to Asia today without accepting the challenge of inculturation.

2. *The Challenge of Poverty and Wealth*

In Asia we are confronted with areas of great poverty and of growing wealth. Each is in its own way a challenge.

The areas of great poverty are in west and south Asia. In India alone there are three hundred million people living below the poverty line, that is to say they have less to eat than the

¹⁶ *The Role of Women in Evangelization*, Document to be found in Flannery A. Vatican Collection Vol. II, Dominican Publications, Dublin 1982 p. 326.

¹⁷ M.D. Chenu, *Interview*, Dominican Ashram, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 60.

minimum required diet for moderate activity. Without that diet a person does not die suddenly, on the other hand you cannot lead a normal life.

Confronted by starving people the young student at the university of Palencia sold his books and furniture in his room. Fr. Vicaire makes an interesting observation. He says Dominic founded a charity. He just didn't give everything away like Francis. The need of the moment demanded more than simple giving. It needed organization. It was an early manifestation of that genius for organization about which Mandonnet speaks. In starting a charity Dominic associated many others with him in his work on behalf of the needy.

There will always be a need for such relief programmes but today there is need for something more. We need to be able to analyse the causes of poverty and the unjust structures which very often create poverty.

The Synod of 1971¹⁸ challenges us when it states that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world" are an integral part of preaching the Gospel. In other words — working for justice is a part of evangelization. Furthermore, if "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world" are "a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel" then failure to preach justice means that the full Gospel word is not preached. If this dimension is missing from our preaching then what takes place may still "appear" to be Gospel preaching but we are deluding ourselves. That is not to say that every sermon should be a plea for justice!

But it is not enough to preach justice, we must also work for justice. The question is how?

In October and November 1986 UNESCO sponsored a series of seminars in Rome, Geneva and Paris to honour the memory of a great Dominican — Louis Joseph Lebreton. Tribute was paid to his remarkable contribution to the development of the Church's social teaching, his influence on Paul VI and the encyclical letter *Populorum Progressio*. He was able to do this because of the years he spent working among the oppressed fishermen of Brittany in

¹⁸ Flannery A., *Vatican Collection II, Synod of Bishops, Justice in the World*, Pp. 695-710.

France. Reflecting on the work of those years Lebret made a revealing statement: "I discovered that instead of wearing oneself out fighting isolated evils, one must attack their causes". And so he began to develop and apply the tools of social analysis and founded his centre for *Economics and Humanism*.

At the Asian-Pacific Dominican Conference in 1985 (composed of sisters and brothers from the region) it was unanimously adopted "that formation include the experience of living with the poor, (and that) training in social analysis, the teaching of philosophy, theology and spirituality should be firmly situated in the present social dimension and that studies on justice and peace be included in our continuing formation programmes."

The declaration first states the need for an experience of living with the poor. Why? Confronted by the need of others our natural reaction is to do something for them. With a certain naivety we may even think that we know best what they need! But the only ones who can liberate the poor are the poor. The only way that we can really help them is if we allow them to evangelize us first — sit with them and learn from them. Then, but only then, can the tools of social analysis be of help, help us and them to ask the questions which will awaken us both to the reality of their situation and the structures which create the poverty of which they are victims.

Last year during a sharing at Mass with some seminarians living in a asylum one of them said: "When I first came here and saw the conditions in which the people had to live I felt that if I was condemned to live like them I might commit suicide" and then he said with a certain amazement "after three weeks when I got to know them better I discovered that in spite of their poverty and the conditions in which they lived they were full of hope. They taught me the meaning of hope." We must first sit with the poor and allow them to teach us.

A question we might ask ourselves is: How many of our brothers and sisters are working for justice? And how many of our congregations, provinces and vicariates have begun to implement the decisions taken at the Asian Pacific Dominican meeting in 1985?

A number of the region in Guatemala stated: "We will never forgive priests for awakening the people". Unwittingly he paid the Church a great compliment. How proud we might feel to have the same said of us in the years to come.

3. *The Challenge of the Sects*

Another challenge which confronts us today are the Sects. As in Dominic's day, so today, we are witnessing the emergence and rapid proliferation of all kinds of new religious or pseudo-religious movements. Some have their roots in Christianity, others in one of the great world religions or another source. There are over two thousand five hundred sects. While it is not easy to generalize a number pose a threat to peoples freedom and society in general, being highly authoritarian in structure, exercise forms of brainwashing and thought control, they cultivate group pressure and instil feelings of guilt and fear.

It is not just that they compete with us in the mission of the Church — of equal concern is their success in winning adherents from among Catholics. The most immediate pastoral problem is how to deal with a Catholic who has become involved in a sect.

Among the most affected are young people — those who have no work, who have no involvement in church activity, who come from broken families... But the sects also appeal to the idealistic and most energetic among our youth. Such young people are likely targets for the sects. They are active in educational institutions and university campuses. In particular they frequent places where young people will be found alone, and feel vulnerable, such as bus and train stations, campus meeting places... It is a paradox that as the church becomes less involved in direct evangelization — the sects have taken it over developing new techniques to accomplish it, in some cases, adapting the evangelical methods of the early Church. Person to person contact, working two by two.

The report on "*Sects and New Religious Movements*" identifies a number of reasons why the sects have been so successful in recruiting members from among Catholics. The reasons themselves offer the basis for a partial solution.

The sects are not a new phenomena. Historically they tend to thrive during periods of change and stress.¹⁹ They proliferated during the decline of the Roman empire and in modern times before the French Revolution and more recently before and during the rise of fascism and Adolf Hitler. Today the phenomena of the sects seems to be related to the de-personalizing structures of modern society — which have been exported from the West to the rest of the world. This creates tension in people and in society — which in turn creates certain needs and hopes which require satisfactory answers. The sects appear to offer solutions to the tensions and aspirations of such people. What are these tensions and what are the concrete responses which they offer?

In societies which are characterized by the break up of family ties the sects appear to offer an alternative family and fulfill the need for belonging. They offer prospective candidates a nesting place, a secure coat-hanger. They offer protection from the stresses of modern society. They appear to offer human warmth, care and support in small close knit communities, a sharing of purpose and fellowship, which young people do not experience in our large parish structures.

They offer readymade answers to complicated questions and situations.

Thirdly, they respond to the need of many people who feel out of touch with themselves, with others and with society — especially those who experience a certain inadequacy, a lack of wholeness. Such people seek "a religious view which will harmonize everything and everybody — a worship which leaves room for body and soul, for participation, spontaneity and creativity." They seek healing. They offer processes of healing.

Many of the sects appear to offer a satisfying religious experience — being saved, conversion, room for feelings and emotions, help with problems such as drugs and problems related to the tensions created by modern urban society. They are extremely good at using the media in identifying such needs and in the art of developing personal contact.

¹⁹ What I say in "*The Challenge of the Sects*" is a summary of the *Vatican Report on Sects, Cults and New Religious Movements* which may be found in *Origins*, Vol. 16. No. 1 May 1986. An excellent bibliography is included at the end of the document.

In societies undergoing rapid change, many traditional believers share feelings of alienation from their roots as a consequence of migration from rural areas to the new urban industrial centres. Some of the sects seem to offer a place where such people can rediscover their roots.

It is something of a paradox that where there is a lack of parental control and support some young people seek guidance, a rule of life to commit themselves to, they look for leadership, a guru. Many of the sects offer guidance and charismatic leadership. The person of the master plays an important role in binding the members to the sect, a form of leadership which often focuses the allegiance of the members of the sect upon the leader himself rather than upon a god. Furthermore they appear to offer a new vision of oneself, of humanity, of history and the world.

Bishop Claver asks the question "What single Vatican II idea has lead to the most radical change in the Church's pastoral ministry? The key pastoral idea, he suggests, is *Participation*. Whether this is so in Asia is another question. The involvement of the laity in the ministry of the Church, the creation of ministries which involve them in the various aspects of the Church's life. We are only beginning to do this.

But participation is precisely what some of the sects offer their members and the key to their success. Participation in planning, ministry, in spreading the good news of the sect... They appear to offer a concrete realizable mission for a better world.

Many of the sects are fundamentalist and there is evidence that a number receive funds from certain governments who see them as allies in the pursuit of their down political goals. "In many countries we suspect, and in some cases know, that powerful ideological forces as well as economic and political interests are at work through the sects..."

In many cases the sects offer services which we have failed to provide in the church, services which are part of our Christian

tradition. Smaller parishes and a greater involvement of the laity might make it possible to do so.

The Vatican report already mentioned outlines a number of ways in which we can counter the impact of the sects. The following is a brief summary taken from the report.

(1) "Almost all the responses to the questionnaire that was sent out appeal for a re-thinking of the traditional parish-community system and a search for community patterns which are more fraternal and more adapted to people's life situation. They also ask for the establishment of more basic ecclesial communities, caring communities of lively faith, love (warmth of understanding, reconciliation and fellowship) and hope, celebrating communities; praying communities, outgoing and missionary; communities open to and supporting people who have special problems..."

(2) "The responses also put emphasis" on the need for evangelization, catechesis, education and ongoing education in the faith, biblical, theological, economical — of the faithful... and of the clergy and those involved in formation."

(3) "People must be helped to know themselves as unique, loved by a personal God and with a personal history from birth through death to resurrection." "Special attention must be paid to the experiential dimension, i.e. discovering Christ personally through prayer and dedication (e.g. the charismatic and born again movements) ... Special attention must be given to the healing ministry through prayers, reconciliation, fellowship and care. Our pastoral concern should not be one-dimensional; it should extend not only to the spiritual but also to the physical, psychological, social, cultural, economic and political dimension.

(4) "The question of inculturation is a fundamental one..."

(5) "Some suggested a rethinking of the classic Saturday evening / Sunday morning liturgical patterns, which often remain foreign to the daily life situation. ... There should be room for joyful creativity, a belief in Christian inspiration and capacity of "invention" and a greater sense of communal celebration. ... Many

respondents insist on the biblical dimension of preaching; on the need to speak the people's language; the need for careful preparation of preaching and liturgy as far as possible done by a team, including lay participation.

Conclusion

In countries like the Philippines where the churches are full there is a danger of being lulled into a false security. Our greatest danger is complacency. Reading the signs of our times, the sects present us with a very serious challenge.

II. REDISCOVERING OUR DOMINICAN CHARISM FOR TODAY

At a function to honour Yves Congar, Leon Zander, an Orthodox theologian recalled one of the criticisms made of Fr. Congar, "you reply to every demand made on you, you work too hard, you are overburdened." Fr. Congar's reply was 'I cannot refuse them, St. Dominic would not have (refused them) either.' Leon Zander's comment on this was: "There is the perfect application of the general rule of iconology — the identification of the type with the prototype." Looking at Fr. Congar, he said: "I saw in you, the icon of St. Dominic."²⁰

A remarkable tribute from a theologian of the Orthodox tradition.

Each one of us is called to be an icon, the visible presence of Dominic in the world — for today. But we can be an icon of St. Dominic, only, if we share in Dominic's spirit — the Spirit of Jesus as manifested in his life.²¹

The most important gift that a founder transmits to his followers is a share in his own spirit — that particular charismatic manifestation of the Holy Spirit which distinguishes the founder himself.

²⁰ N. Molloy, *In the Spirit of St. Dominic*, Dominican Ashram, Vol. 1, No. 2. p. 76-77

²¹ Idem, cf. p. 78

That spirit is not something that we can easily catch from a book. Rather, it is something — like a cold — it is caught from someone. For us, that someone is Dominic. Indeed, some of us need to catch it more than once because we tend to loose touch with it.

Our Constitutions emphasize the importance of Dominic as the model of Dominican life. Just as the spirit of Moses was shared among the seventy elders and as Elisha asked Elijah for a double share in his spirit, Dominicans will, too, share in the spirit of St. Dominic.

The mystery of the communication of the spirit of Dominic within the Dominican Family is a special realization of the mystery of the Communication of the Spirit of Jesus in the Church. In the community of the Church we find Jesus. In the Dominican community we find the Spirit of Jesus mediated to us through Dominic.²²

Jordan of Saxony ends his life of Dominic by urging his followers to walk in the footsteps of St. Dominic and "give thanks to the Redeemer who has given us such a leader."

A thorough familiarity with Dominic's spiritual and apostolic character is a must for us Dominicans. Modern scholarship enables us to examine, perhaps better than ever before, the man Dominic. In this talk, I invite you to reflect with me on certain aspects of Dominic's spiritual and apostolic character with special reference to today.

1. A Tranquil and Joyous Spirit

He was a man of immense charm, with a great breadth of vision, compassionate to an extraordinary degree, with an incredible "zeal for souls" in deep union with God, an organizational genius.

With a certain humour, Simon Tugwell has said of him: "Contrary to the previous tradition of religious life, Dominic believed in the virtue of laughter."²³ Jordan of Saxony tells us

²² Idem, cf. p. 80

²³ S. Tugwell, *Prayer*, Veritas Publications, Dublin 1974, Vol. 1 p. 138.

"No one more than he mingled in the company of his brothers or companions on the road and no one was happier than he." He cultivated cheerfulness. If he wept — he also knew how to laugh. Dominican spirituality is a joyous spirituality which affirms the goodness of created things and "faith in the absolute priority of God's grace in any human activity..." and so there is no "cramped self concern but trust in God" whom I can trust more than myself. A trust which is based on the conviction that we belong to God. Dominic transmitted this tranquil, joyous spirit to us.

2. *Spontaneity*

Another of Dominic's characteristic was spontaneity. "Spontaneity was one of the traits Dominic transmitted to his followers." The "evidence of the witnesses at the process of his canonization has preserved the sudden spontaneity of his traits and his quick vivid phrases. It is significant that they have been echoed, often so unconsciously among his followers for seven hundred years... Spontaneity was to remain a note of Dominican spirituality and perhaps the primary characteristic of its school of prayer."²⁴

3. *The Personal Following of Christ — Our Jesus Spirituality*

A third characteristic is, "Dominic's utter concentration upon the personal following of Christ which was to dwarf all other devotions in the Order." The desire to spend himself for others as Christ had spent Himself on the Cross. That same desire was to drive the greatest missionaries among us across the boundaries of the known world — east to Central Asia and later west across the Atlantic and south into the Asia-Pacific area.²⁵

Dominic gave to the Order its "Jesus Spirituality" its devotion to the "humanity of Jesus" which has so characterized the lives of men and women like Albert, Thomas, Catherine, Rose, Eckhart, Tauler and so many others, together with the two particular Dominican devotions, to Mary and Joseph.

²⁴ G. Mathews, *Dominican Spirituality*, Blackfriars 1945

²⁵ *Idem*

Then there was Dominic's respect for freedom of spirit, his respect for the individual person — the uniqueness of each one. And so the Dominican spirit has always been marked by individual variety. The saints, the beati, of the Order have achieved sanctity in very different settings; in the studia, sisters monasteries, parish houses, as missionaries, as lay Dominicans or in the itinerant life of the preacher.

4. *Reading the Signs of our Times*

Edward Schillebeeckx in his study of Dominican Spirituality reminds us that when we became Dominicans — we tied the story of our lives to the story of the Dominican Family. My life story, your life story, took on a new direction when we joined the Congregation and the Order. But the Dominican story is not yet over. Each one of us is invited to write, to weave if you like, a new chapter in that on-going story. The story of our lives as Dominicans energises the unfolding story of the Dominican Family.²⁶

The chapter that we write will be authentic if we continually test it in the light of the Gospel, for the Dominican story is only valid if it takes up the story of Jesus. "To follow Jesus is the supreme norm of any form of religious life."²⁷

The story of Jesus, the story of Dominic. Vatican II gave us a third criterion of renewal. The relationship between the story of Jesus and the original story of Dominic on the one hand and *the changed requirements of the time*, on the other. "Without a living relationship to the present, any talk about the spirit of St. Dominic is a purely historical preoccupation with the past."²⁸

This means, that TODAY, the Dominican spirit cannot be determined simply by appealing to the original Dominican story or as it has evolved over the past 700 years. This we presuppose. We have to live our Dominican story today — and read the signs of our times as Dominic, Albert, Catherine, Thomas, Lebreton and so many others did in theirs.

²⁶ E. Schillebeeckx, *God Among Us*, S.C.M. Press, London 1983. Cf. p. 232

²⁷ *Renewal of Religious Life*, Vatican II

²⁸ Schillebeeckx, p. 239

This *third criteria* given us by Vatican II — *the changed circumstances of our times* is critical in helping us to understand the nature of our Dominican charism for today. The Dominican spirit is a living reality to be realized among us now. Dominic understood the need for this *third criteria*. He built it into our Constitutions — the need for ongoing reflection and change. This was part of his genius, his vision and spirit.

5. *An Openness to New Charisms*

A further characteristic was his openness to new charisms. An openness to new ideas — truth from whatever source it came. Dominic lived during a time of great social change when the very structures of society were being scrutinized and questioned. He read the signs of his time and committed himself to the future. And so his spirit is characterized by an openness to new ideas and charisms required by the changing structures of the time. Furthermore, he saw the need for structures which did not close doors. With his practical genius for organization he made a commitment to structures which were democratic and flexible — adapted to new and emerging charisma. As if to say, "if there is need for change today, let us remain open to possible change tomorrow." And so he conceived of the Constitutions — not as static pieces of legislation but ones that must be constantly tested and re-appraised. In so doing he broke down the old feudal structures of monastic life and created a new religious programme. He had a fine sensitivity both to religious values from the past and to the religious promise of the future — emanating from the modern experiments of his time. That same openness challenges us today — that openness to new ideas and charisms — to truth from whatever source it comes — the church, fellow religious or the secular world. The danger is that we become so rooted in the past that we close ourselves to the new ideas and charisms of our time.

By way of illustrating this openness to changing needs, Schillebeeckx cites the example that though the Constitutions of 1223-1231 stated: "Our brothers may not study the books of pagan writers... and far less may they study the secular sciences," twenty years later "Albert and Thomas considered the study of

secular sciences and pagan philosophers as a necessary part of the formation for an appropriate Dominican apostolate."²⁹ Subsequently they were vindicated in this new orientation and the early prohibition was removed from the Constitutions. In the context of Asia today, that orientation might include the careful study of the great Asian religions, cultural anthropology, social psychology, social analysis and an examination of the phenomenal growth of the Sects. It is a typically Dominican spirit following the example of St. Dominic to reshape the old and combine it with the dynamism of constantly new and different ideas. Such was Dominic himself, Albert, Thomas and so many others.

But history indicates that we have not always been faithful to this openness to new and emerging charisms — new ideas. Ignatius of Loyola was imprisoned in the cellar of one of our Dominican houses. And although Tommaso Campanella wrote in defence of Galileo there were other Dominicans who had a hand in his condemnation. There are many such stories in which we failed to be faithful to our charism. As Schillebeeckx says: "when Dominicans were no longer Dominicans."

Dominic looked at the present with all its possibilities and its challenges, as we too must look at the present with all its possibilities and challenges. Simultaneously, he evaluated the past. Out of this twofold movement the Dominican Order was born.

"To be present to God" and "to be present to the world" are the qualities which characterized the Dominican spirit throughout the history of the Order. In the last century, Henri Lacordaire encapsulated that ideal in one sentence: *"It is the grace of understanding the present century."*

Two Pivotal Moments in Dominic's Life

Any spirituality presents a reorganization of the Christian life on the basis of a central intuition or insight. Reflection on that experience deepens its impact and makes it possible to carry that faith experience to a deeper level. At the basis of every

²⁹ G. Gutierrez, *We drink from Our Own Wells*, S.C.M. Press, London 1984. Cf. Chapter 3.

spirituality, there is a particular experience, which is had by a concrete person, living at a particular time, an experience which is proper to them but one that it is possible to communicate to others and is eventually proposed to the Church as a way of following Christ — not *the way* but *a way*.

There are two moments in Dominic's life (among many others), successive moments, which were to shape the subsequent story of his life.

The first was his contact with the people of Northern Europe which sparked the desire to be a missionary. From 1206 at the latest we know that Dominic was filled with the desire to be a missionary. A desire that was never fulfilled but a desire that never died. In 1217 he confided his intention of going to preach in Northern Europe to William of Montferrat. They would go together when he had finished organizing the Order and he began to grow his beard. It is interesting to note that in 1221 the missionaries sent with Paul of Hungary asked to go to the Cumans. They were to fulfill Dominic's dream. He never made it. His dream was transmuted into something else.

The second moment is the Montpellier event. One morning or evening in June 1206, Diego and Dominic entered the walled town where they met and talked with the dispirited papal legates preaching among the Albigensians. Far from consoling them we are told that Diego shocked them with a proposal, which, we are told, smacked to them of novelty. As Diego and Dominic saw it "the greatest asset that the heretics possessed was their evangelical quality." If the Church was to defeat them — it too must imitate the life pattern of the apostles, preaching on foot in poverty.

It was more than the legates could immediately stomach. They suggested that Diego might lead them. Diego and Dominic did. So the enterprise known simply as "the Preaching" or "the Preaching of Jesus Christ" began. At its head was the "Master of Preaching."

But the great weakness of "the Preaching" was the fact that the first participants were religious, mostly Cistercians, with other commitments — most only stayed on the job a few months and Diego died before the problem could be solved.

But Dominic continued to play upon the original inspiration. The Montpellier event was to occupy the rest of his life. It wasn't until 1215 that the dream finally began to come true. To safeguard the continuity of "the preaching", the Order was born. In Bishop Fulk's words: "... they have committed themselves to travelling religiously on foot, in evangelical poverty and to preaching the word of evangelical truth".

The project was preaching. Dominic preached to everyone, everywhere. In the beginning, the need was so great that he sent out simple uneducated men, even novices were not exempt. When a novice, Buonvisa, expressed fear, Dominic simply told him that he would pray for him.

If, in the beginning, some went out to preach with little preparation that was not Dominic's intention for the future. He saw study as an integral part of a training programme for the preacher. John of Spain tells us that he always carried with him the Gospel of Matthew and the Letters of Paul and that furthermore he constantly encouraged the brethren to study the New and Old Testaments. In the summer of 1215 Dominic began taking his first companions to the theology lectures of Alexander Stavensby. Two years later in 1217, he asked and received a letter from the Holy See — a Letter to the University of Paris, commanding a certain number of theologians be sent to lecture and preach at Toulouse. Dominic never used this letter because the situation at Toulouse deteriorated, instead, he sent the brethren to Paris.

But it does highlight the importance that he attached to study and the resolution with which he pursued it. He had no hesitation in enlisting the help of the Holy See in promoting his vision. The source of that help was unimportant — what mattered was that they possessed the truth and competence, in a word excellence. The same attitude should apply today. If others excel us in one field or another, listen to them, learn from them.

6. Apostolic Freedom

Finally, a word about Apostolic freedom. Cardinal Villot in a letter to the Order in 1970 described Dominic as being "stupefyingly free."

For Dominic, freedom of spirit was not an accident, but a deliberate choice. An apostolic tool. His itinerant life style, the insistence on mobility, our democratic system of government, the supremacy of the General Chapter in the Order, the submission of his opinions to others, the law of dispensation, a simplified liturgy, the simplicity of Dominican buildings, his openness to new ideas and new charisms are all aspects of his conviction of the need of apostolic freedom. His very spontaneity was a fruit of this apostolic freedom which he wished to inculcate in us. The freedom to preach.

There is nothing that frightens people more than freedom and the responsibility it imposes. But for us it is not a choice. It is an essential ingredient of the Dominican Spirit.

We haven't always been faithful to it. The pursuit of security sometimes leads us to mortgage our apostolic freedom to institutions and work which offer us a certain level of comfort and financial security. This robs us of much more than our mobility. New charisms, new ideas, are sometimes seen as a threat to our security. It deadens our spontaneity. Slowly we lose the ability to be creative and to make a creative response to the "signs of our times." We are no longer capable of creating a typical Dominican strategy for our day, and are in danger of becoming irrelevant.

Conclusion

A joyous tranquil spirit, spontaneity, the personal following of Christ, (with all it entails) an openness to new ideas and charisms, study in the service of the Gospel, an ability to read the signs of the times together with a carefully guarded apostolic freedom which enabled him to respond to the challenges of his day — all characterized Dominic's spirit and should characterize our spirit today.

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