

Dominican Spirituality

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Spirituality

1. Dominican Spirituality
2. The Ministry of the World
3. The Gifts of the Holy Spirit
4. Blessed Osanna d'Andreasi and Other Renaissance Italian Dominican Women Mystics
5. Dominic Cavalca and a Spirituality of the Word
6. St. Antoninus of Florence and Christian Community
7. St. Catherine & Contemporary Spirituality

DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY

- **One faith: Many Spiritualities**
- **The Four Fundamentals**
- **Ministry of the Word**
- **Community**
- **Prayer**
- **Study**
- **The Dominican Family**
- **Can the Laity Preach?**
- **The Spirituality of the Dominican Laity**
- **Bibliography**

One faith: Many Spiritualities

When we speak of a Christian “spirituality” we simply mean the Christian life (which is life in the Holy Spirit given us by the Father through His Son Jesus Christ) lived with an **emphasis** on certain values. Within the community of the Church there have always been, even in New Testament times, a variety of such spiritualities. One and the same Gospel is proclaimed in the four Gospels and in the epistles of St. Paul, yet each of these writers speaks with a different emphasis, a different spirituality. As long as these different emphases do not become unbalanced and one-sided their variety contributes to the richness of Christian life.

Every Christian is free to choose the spirituality which is most helpful to his or her own spiritual growth, provided that we remain open to other spiritualities which complement and balance the one we have chosen. Among the great historic traditions of spirituality that which expresses the charism of St. Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers, has attracted many and been found especially healthy and helpful.

The Four Fundamentals

The revised **Constitutions of the Brethren of the Order of Preachers** in 1969 included a “Fundamental Constitution,” based on a careful historical study of our traditions. This is the most authoritative statement of the permanent features of the Order which St. Dominic founded and thus of his spirituality. An analysis of this statement shows that it can be simplified still further and expressed as the four fundamentals of Dominican life: (1) the Order’s mission of the Ministry of the Word; (2) community like; (3) prayer; and (4) study of the Word.

Ministry of the Word

Dominic was called by God in a special way to the Ministry of the Word — to “preach.” It was from this call that his whole spirituality, his whole emphasis in the Christian life developed and in terms of which it can best be understood. It is important, however, not to misunderstand the term “preaching” as it stands in the title of the Order of Preachers. That is why the revised **Constitutions** use the term “Ministry of the Word” to avoid misunderstandings that have arisen because of the misleading connotations in our times of the term “preaching.”

The first misunderstanding is to take the term “preaching” too **broadly** to mean simply “witnessing to the Gospel” in any of the ways it can be witnessed. The whole of the Christian life is a witnessing to the Gospel and this includes every form of ministry. Vatican II made clear that the ministry of Christ and of every Christian is threefold: (1) the Ministry of the Word (preaching, teaching, evangelizing, prophesying); (2) the ministry of community building (governing, shepherding, social action, charitable works, etc.); (3) the ministry of worship (priestly ministry in the narrow sense of celebrating the sacraments and intercessory prayer). It is confusing to speak of ministries of the second and third sort as “preaching” (although they may

present opportunities for preaching). Only the first is preaching in a strict and proper sense and it was to this Ministry of the Word that Dominic was called.

Dominic made a choice of this ministry and left the rest to others, as did the Twelve when they said, "It is not right for us to neglect the preaching of God's word in order to wait on tables.... We ourselves, then will give our full time to prayer and the work of preaching" (Acts 6:2,4). It is a mistake, therefore, to say that "the Dominican apostolate is anything a Dominican does." To be true to our calling as followers of Dominic, faithful to his spirit, we must choose the Ministry of the Word in preference to any other of the great Christian ministries.

A second misunderstanding of the term "preaching" is to take it too **narrowly** as do those who identify it with the preaching of the homily at the Eucharist by an ordained priest. In the early days of the Order brothers (even novices) who were not yet ordained were sometimes sent to preach, and preaching was often done outside Mass and even outside a church. St. Paul tells us to "preach in season and out of season" (II Tim. 4:2). The place or time does not characterize preaching. Nor is Dominican preaching limited to any one class of people. It should be adapted to meet the needs of all people from the youngest to the oldest, the least educated to the most learned, and must deal with the simplest and also the most profound topics.

Nor is Dominican preaching limited to some one style of communication or some one medium. Its aim is to reach people both intellectually and emotionally, whether by the written or spoken word, or even through the plastic and performing arts, by radio or by television.

What makes preaching really preaching is none of these things but only that it is a **communication of the Gospel Word** in a way that not only moves the heart but also illumines the mind with the light of an understanding, growing faith. It was St. Dominic's special insight that a **true** understanding of the faith is not just for the elite but for every Christian. Strangely, although Our Lord devoted His own ministry chiefly to instructing the people, even the most ignorant to whom He communicated His message in the stories we call "parables," yet throughout the history of the Church it has been the Ministry of the Word which seems to have been the most neglected. We build churches, celebrate the sacraments, perform works of charity, but we neglect to instruct the people. It was this ignorance of their religion which exposed the

people of Dominic's day to the Manichaean heresy and St. Dominic's perception of this great need was the founding inspiration of his Order.

The third misunderstanding about the meaning of the term "preaching" — an error which is encouraged by the individualism of American culture — is the notion that if the purpose of the Dominican Order is to preach, then every Dominican must be a preacher. Certainly, this was not St. Dominic's understanding. Even before he founded his brotherhood he founded a convent of cloistered nuns who did not preach. The nuns of our Dominican family are not any less Dominicans because as contemplatives they are excluded from the active ministry of preaching. Moreover, in the Brotherhood there were always brethren who did not preach, including some who were ordained priests. Preaching is the purpose of the Order **as a community**, not of the its members simply as individuals.

Just as in any army only some of the soldiers are front-line troops and these could not fight without the support of many other soldiers who may never actually engage in a battle, so in the Dominican family the cooperative effort of preaching requires many particular tasks other than the actual delivery of sermons, of which one fundamental task is that of the intercessory prayer and vicarious penance of the nuns, as Dominic so clearly realized.

It is true, of course, that we ought to avoid over-loading our cooperative efforts with a supernumerary bureaucracy. We should seek to free as many of our Dominicans as possible for the direct function of preaching, but none of us should complain or feel that we are second-class citizens because we do not ourselves preach, as long as we are called to tasks which really further and support the work of those who do preach. With St. Paul we should rejoice in their work and say, "All that matters is that in any and every way ... Christ is being proclaimed. That is what brings me joy!" (Phil. 1:10).

Community

The second fundamental feature of Dominic's Order and its spirituality is community life, because Dominic learned from hard experience that the Ministry of the Word cannot succeed as a merely individual effort but requires the team-work of many. Today some young people seek religious life primarily because it offers community living. That motive is healthy, but it was not

Dominic's guiding motive. For him the Ministry of the Word was the primary motive, and the community was an essential resource for performing that ministry effectively. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to oppose these two motives. The Gospel we preach is the Gospel of God's Kingdom, that is, of true community in the Spirit of Christ. To preach that Kingdom we must live it, so that preaching and living in Christian community are inseparably joined. Thus Dominican community is not a mere means to preaching, but rather it is the very **source** of the authenticity of our preaching. This implies of course that it is a truly Christian community whose unity is founded not merely in good human relations but in those relations transformed by faith, hope, and sacrificial love. Christ Himself must be the center and His Spirit the binding soul of community.

Such a community, like every Christian community, is rooted in our baptismal commitment to Christ and achieves its fullest realization in our communion in the Eucharist. If that communion is to be genuine it must express our readiness to support each other in difficulties and to rejoice with each other in achievements. It must truly be a brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ who is ever ready to listen, to forgive, to help, even at the cost of His own life.

A Gospel community can never be satisfied simply with the fulfillment of its duties; it seeks to imitate the Lord by the counsels of a poverty that frees us from caring for things to love persons, by a chastity that purifies our love for persons, and an obedience that submits our own notions and inclinations to the welfare of the community and its mission. St. Dominic, like his contemporary St. Francis, put a special emphasis on poverty, because he knew that no preacher can be believed when he speaks of heaven, when it is only too obvious that he is concerned about things of earth. Unlike St. Francis, however, for Dominic poverty was not the key-note of his spirituality. St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that religious poverty is not to be measured by how little we possess, but by whether we possess only what is proportionate to the end of the Order (**Summa Theologiae** II-II q. 188, a.7 c), i.e. useful for our preaching mission and the kind of life which supports it.

Dominic did not want to make obedience a burden, as is seen from his explicit insistence that the **Constitutions** of his order should not bind under sin. The obedience typical of our Order is not "blind" or servile, but a willingness to cooperate in a common task, to admit that we need to temper our own opinions and impulses by learning to live and work with others. Cooperation is

not contrary to creativity, but makes it possible for the gifts of individuals to bear better fruit. Dominic was noted for the chastity of his life, which made him clear-headed and warmly sensitive to the feelings of others. Since we preach “Christ and Him crucified” (I Cor. 1:23), we must come to know Him intimately in contemplation, and this openness and vulnerability are impossible to those whose eyes are blinded and hearts hardened by lust, like those of whom St. Paul said, “One sees in them men without conscience, without loyalty, without affection, without compassion” (Romans 1:31).

Life in community is necessarily **penitential** in that it requires self-sacrifice. St. Dominic insisted that his community live a life of penance through “regular observance”, that is, by following a pattern of common life which required rigorous discipline of unruly desires for pleasure and comfort, and of a concentration on the mission of the Order. As his own example shows us, however, there was a deeper motive for his own penances which he also wished to inspire in his disciples. Dominic hungered and thirsted to be united with Christ in His offering of himself to God for the conversion of sinners. He accepted and even sought suffering that he might preach Christ’s passion and share in it in order that his preaching might achieve its life-giving effect. In all the great saints of his Order this irresistible desire to join Jesus on the Cross for the sake of sinners is evident. Even if we cannot rise to that height of generosity, still we must at least accept the hardships of our form of life and the frustrations of our ministry in the same spirit.

The conditions of modern life and ministry require that regular observances appropriate to the thirteenth century should be modified. Dominic provided that this could be done in a constitutional way as long as such modification was in the service of the fundamental features of the Order and its mission. Again and again there have been reform movements in our Order seeking to regain the spirit of its founder. Sometimes these movements were unduly influenced by a romanticism that sought to restore the primitive manner of life lived by the first Dominicans. Vatican II has finally taught us that it is foolish to try to turn history backward, at the same time we know that we cannot be true to the charism of St. Dominic unless we find in our times the equivalents to the disciplined and penitential way of life which made him and his first disciples so “Like the Lord” (Dominicus, Dominiani).

Prayer

As Christian community life is the source of Dominican preaching, so prayer is the source of the Spirit of Christ which binds community together. Dominic insisted that when possible our prayer should be liturgical, that is, it should center in the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours, because his whole spirituality was **ecclesial**. He was always conscious that to be Christian is to live as a member of Christ's Body which is the Church (Eph.5: 24), and pray always for its up-building. But Dominic also gave us an example of constant private prayer, often praying far into the night with groans and tears for the conversion of sinners. The little thirteenth century work St. Dominic's **Nine Ways of Prayer** shows how he prayed with his whole being, soul and body. The traditional Dominican liturgy is characterized by its extensive use of bodily gestures: bowing, kneeling, prostrating, processing. Although Dominic often groaned and wept in praying, he could also be joyful in his prayer and used to break out in hymns as he and his disciples, like Jesus and the Twelve, traveled long miles on foot to preach. He always insisted that his brethren sing the liturgy with lively enthusiasm.

Dominican prayer is **contemplative**, which means that it is not limited to petition, but expands to thanksgiving, adoration, and praise of the greatness of the Trinity and the glory of the Crucified. Hence St. Thomas Aquinas could sum up the mission of the Order in the famous formula, "To contemplate and then to share what we have contemplated with others" (**Summa Theologiae** II-II, q. 188, a.6 c.). The **Dialogue** of St. Catherine of Siena, so imbued with Dominic's own spirit, shows us how the great truths of the Creed cease to be mere formulas and become living realities through contemplative prayer.

Our model for this contemplation of the Incarnate Word has always been the Mother of God herself who "treasured all these things [the events of her Son's life] and reflected on them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Although the legends of its origin in St. Dominic's time are not historical, since at least the fifteenth century the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary has been associated with Dominic's Order. It combines the Dominican use of physical gestures in prayer in the "telling of the beads" with the contemplation of the events of Jesus' life in the presence of His Mother and with her aid.

Central to the Rosary and to all Dominican contemplation are the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Passion. With St. Paul we are "to preach Christ, and Him crucified" (I Cor.1:23) because God revealed Himself most perfectly just where He seemed most concealed — on the Cross. Aquinas

said that he learned more from his crucifix than from any book, and all our saints have made the Cross the chief object of their study and prayer. No wonder then that so many of our mystics have experienced the passion in their own bodies, as did St. Catherine, through the stigmata. The Joyful and Glorious Mysteries, however, cannot be separated from the Cross, and have also been experienced by our saints, some who have had visions of the Divine Child, and others of the final triumph of Christ in the glorification of His Church (the Coronation). Dominican contemplation comes to understand these mysteries not merely in an other-worldly sense but also as illuminating the every day events of our lives and the unfolding of the drama of history (“the signs of the times”). These mysteries are all summed up in the Sacraments, especially in the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. The Sacrament of Reconciliation completes our penance and conversion, and the Eucharist is, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, at once “a memorial of Our Lord’s Passion, a present renewal of His grace, and a pledge of the glory to come”

Study

St. Dominic’s most unique contribution to the development of Christian spirituality was his insistence that the study of the Word of God is not merely an aid to prayer (the monks had always known that in their practice of spiritual reading or *lectio divina*), but is itself an act of worship which sanctifies us. Probably Dominic did not realize that he was thus renewing an Old Testament theme of which the rabbis have always been fond, namely, that meditation on the Law of God is a form of contemplation and worship. For Dominic it was obvious that without such study his brethren could never successfully extend their preaching not merely to simple exhortations (as St. Francis and his disciples did) but to the full range from “milk for babes” to “solid food for-spiritual adults” (I Cor. 3:2). If preaching is to reach every class of persons in different times and places and if it is to deal not only with elementary truths but also with the deep mysteries of God, the preacher or teacher must devote him or herself to hard study, according to the talents of each.

Dominican study concentrates on the Word of God, first as that is found in the Holy Scriptures, and then as these Scriptures are interpreted by the Tradition of the Church as this Tradition develops to meet the needs of every age. This, of course, means that we need the assistance of theology. At the beginning of the Order the brethren were forbidden to studying any other subject lest they lose sight of the real purpose of their studies; but St. Albert the Great and St.

Thomas Aquinas led the way to widening studies to include the liberal arts and philosophy (that is, secular subjects in general), not for their own sake but because they saw that this was necessary to develop a theology adequate to meet the needs of the times. All the more today we need a knowledge of many things if we are to understand the Holy Scriptures properly and apply them to the concerns of our age.

St. Francis feared that the pursuit of academic degrees by his little brothers would destroy that humility and simplicity which he so wished them to achieve. He was not mistaken, because experience shows that the desire for knowledge and the power and prestige it brings can be a real temptation to feel oneself superior to the ignorant and inclined to exploit them. Yet St. Dominic knew that there can also be temptations in ignorance and mental laziness, in error and prejudice. The three safeguards for the Dominican student are (1) the love of wisdom; (2) prayer; (3) community dialogue. If we truly love wisdom we will never be content with superficialities, and the deeper we go in our studies the more we will become conscience of our ignorance. If we combine our study with prayer, God will show us how little we really know in comparison with the divine mysteries, as St. Thomas did when he said of the **Summa**, "Compared with what God has shown me in prayer, it is but straw!" Finally, nothing so aids us to balance our ideas and to see how limited is our understanding as the free exchange of our ideas in the community, where they will be criticized and questioned!

One of the chief advantages of Dominican community is this exchange of ideas, where each person can contribute what they have learned, whether from prayer, or from books, or from their work. Dominican life is lived fully only when every community becomes a school where all are teachers and all students. In each of his communities Dominic wished there to be a **rector** who could teach the others, but all have something to give the others of the truth. The motto of the Order is the one word **Truth**. It would be a grave mistake to think that this means simply the abstract truths which can be taught in an academic manner. The Truth in question is not an abstraction but a Person, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Word Incarnate. Our study must all be centered in knowing Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. To preach Him is the purpose of our Order, the center of our community life; He is the One we contemplate in prayer and study. It is in Him that all the elements of our Dominican life find their unity. "I am the way, the **truth**, and the life" (John 14:6). Those words sum up St. Dominic's spirituality.

The Dominican Family

After considering the main features of St. Dominic's spirituality as manifested in his organization of his friars (brothers), the question must be asked how all this applies to the rest of the Dominican Family. But first it must be noted that even within the brotherhood there has always been a division between the clerics who are ordained or are preparing for ordination and the lay or cooperator brothers. **The Fundamental Constitution** states:

Since, by priestly ordination we are co-workers with the episcopacy, we have as our special charge the prophetic function, by which — with due regard for the changing conditions of persons, times and places,—the Gospel of Jesus Christ is announced by word and deed throughout the world, so that divine faith is aroused or more profoundly penetrates the whole of the Christian life and builds up the Body of Christ — which work is completed in the sacraments of faith. (V)

and

Since to dispense the Word of God and the Sacraments of Faith is a priestly task, ours is a clerical religious community. But the cooperator brothers share in its work in a variety of ways because they too, in their chosen role, exercise the common priesthood. (VI)

This statement is certainly historically true, because from the beginning St. Dominic, unlike St. Francis, intended his Order to have a specifically **Priestly** character in order that its mission of preaching might be carried out to the fullest extent. The monastic Orders in their origin were made up of laity, with only a few members ordained to provide the brethren with the sacraments. This was because the purpose of the monastic Orders was the contemplative life, not the ministry, which they engaged in only when the needs of the Church demanded it. Even St. Francis seems to have conceived of his disciples as contemplatives, even as hermits, whose ministry to the poor was incidental. Dominic, on the other hand, was a **canon** before he founded the order, that is, a priest assisting his bishop in ministry, and he founded his order precisely for the Ministry of the word. This explains why he chose the **Rule of St. Augustine** since Augustine had written it (or at least adapted it) for the group of priests he had gathered to live in community and to serve his flock.

Nevertheless, from the beginning the Order also included non-ordained brothers. Dominic wanted to entrust the business administration of the Order to them, but could not obtain the agreement of the other priests to this. Since preaching is the end of the Order, to this all the members of the Order must contribute but not all by preaching; there are many things that need to be done that do not require ordination. Today cooperator Brothers can share in the work of the Order in many ways, including those forms of preaching and teaching for which ordination is not needed. If at any time they wish to become permanent deacons or to undertake the preparation necessary for the priesthood, and are qualified, these ways also remain open to them throughout their lives.

Since the Church, in view of her tradition which apparently goes back to the example of Our Lord Himself, does not feel herself free to admit women to ordination, not because they are inferior to men but because of sacramental symbolism which requires different roles for men and women, it needs to be asked why Dominic admitted women to the clerical Order which he founded. In fact many of the early Dominicans strongly resisted the affiliation of women to the Order and it was only through pressure from the popes and the advocacy of Hugh of St. Cher, that this was finally accepted as a regular feature of the order which has proved one of its greatest glories. St. Dominic himself, as we have seen, was convinced that his preaching brethren needed the spiritual assistance of the contemplative nuns, and he founded three communities of them and was planning a fourth when he died. He hoped that these communities might also prove to be centers of refuge and instruction for the women converted from heresy. Historically, the nuns of our Order have fulfilled this contemplative aspect of our Order in a marvelous way and have produced many saints and blessed.

Although it would seem that the total dedication of our nuns to penance and contemplation excludes them from preaching, in fact many of them have engaged in instructing and counseling those who come to them either by letters and other forms of writing, or by works of art. Today such opportunities have increased, provided they are kept within the limits proper to the contemplative. It should be noted that throughout our history there have also been some men of the Order who have been called to live a more contemplative life and have been left free of external ministry to devote themselves to that life on behalf of the Order.

From a very early period, both Franciscans and Dominicans began to accept the affiliation of Brothers and Sisters of Penance, that is, members of a lay movement that had grown up concurrently with the friars. These lay persons lived under a rule of their own, but a Master of the our Order, Munio of Zamora, in 1285 adapted this rule for Dominican affiliates. In 1405, largely through the efforts of St. Catherine's disciple Thomas Caffarini, it received papal approval. Soon women who wished to live in community but without the restrictions of the cloister asked to be affiliated to the Order under this rule, not as nuns but simply as **sisters**. Thus the so-called "Third Order" (as distinguished from the First Order friars, and the Second Order nuns) was divided into the Sisters who take vows, and the Laity who do not. It has grown to become the greater part of the Order. While some have been made to establish communities of Third Order men, today such groups have not succeeded for long. In recent years secular institutes have also been founded in affiliation to the Order, whose members live a form of canonically consecrated life, but in the world. This great variety of ways of being a Dominican received recognition in the revised **Constitutions** under the name of "the Dominican Family."

Since the middle of the nineteenth century the Sisters engaged in active ministry have become an outstanding feature of our Family. While such communities were affiliated to the Order from the thirteenth century on, the tendency was for them to adopt the cloister and gradually to become almost indistinguishable from the nuns. But in the nineteenth century new needs in the Church for teachers, nurses, and social work both in Europe and in the missions gave rise to many foundations of Sisters engaged in active ministry, and the Dominican Order shared powerfully in this movement. It must be admitted, however, that so rapid was this development that until Vatican II not a great deal of thought was given to how this form of life conformed with the purpose of our Order.

Ministries were undertaken which had no clear relation to preaching, and the form of life of the Sisters was often an eclectic mixture of elements taken from the cloistered life of nuns and from non-Dominican sources, and were often in tension with the ministries accepted. Today Dominican Sisters are faced with remedying this situation by developing their own characteristic way of life within the Dominican Family.

How can Dominican Sisters, who are not, as are the Nuns, the contemplative source of the Order's preaching, and who cannot be ordained to preach as many of their brothers, be said to

share in the work of the Order of Preachers? The answer to this question is important not only to them, but to the Dominican Laity, most of whom are also excluded by sex or marriage from ordination, and who, even if single, are not called to it.

Can the Laity Preach?

Historically the movement which produced the Orders of Dominic and Francis in the thirteenth century were preceded by a widespread movement of lay preaching. Because many of these preachers were ill prepared and fell into one-sided, heretical views, Innocent III welcomed the work of Dominic and Francis who were unswervingly loyal to the official teaching of the Church. Vatican II, however, emphasized that the three-fold basic ministry of the Church does not pertain exclusively to the ordained but is shared in by all the faithful by reason of their baptism. Moreover, today many of the laity are prepared by theological education for the Ministry of the Word. This is recognized in the new **Code of Canon Law**.

Canon 759. The lay members of Christ's faithful, by reason of their baptism and confirmation are witnesses to the good news of the Gospel, by their words and by the example of their Christian life. They can also be called upon to cooperate with Bishops and priests in the exercise of the ministry of the word.

Can 766. The laity may be allowed to preach in a church or oratory if in certain circumstances it is necessary, or in particular cases it would be advantageous, according to the provisions of the Episcopal Conference and without prejudice to can.767 #1.

Canon 767 # 1. The most important form of preaching is the homily, which is part of the liturgy, and is reserved to a priest or deacon.

Obviously in 766 and 767 the term "preaching" is used in a narrow sense to mean preaching in church in connection with the liturgy or other pare-liturgical occasions; but in 759 the term "ministry of the word" has the broader sense emphasized at the beginning of this essay. It should also be noted that the preaching of the laity, as that of priests, is necessarily under the control of

the bishop to whom it principally belongs to proclaim the Gospel (Canon 763 and 772). This is in keeping with St. Dominic's own great concern to obtain the approbation of the Pope for his Order of Preachers.

From these canonical considerations it follows that a vast field for the Ministry of the Word is open to the non-ordained members of the Dominican Family. No doubt many of them will wonder why "the most important form of preaching", "the homily" is open only to priest members of the Order, and these must be male. Nevertheless, the fact that the Eucharistic homily is, in some sense, "the most important form of preaching" does not imply that the other forms of the Ministry of the Word are unimportant or even in the circumstances of our times perhaps more important in their actual power and effect than the brief homily given on Sunday morning to those who are for the most part good Catholics. It would be a great shame if the laudable desire to preach homilies should by its frustration kill the desire to preach in other ways actually open to the non-ordained.

In fact in our times there are several forms of the Ministry of the Word which have the possibility of being more effective than preaching in church. The first of these is religious education from the most elementary catechetical instruction to adult education and the teaching of theology at the university level. Dominican Sisters have been very largely engaged in such educational work with notable success, and many of the Dominican laity are teachers. Some may say that this is teaching not preaching, but it is certainly part of the Ministry of the Word, as the example of many of our greatest Dominicans such as St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, or today Yves Congar.

The second is through the use of the public media by writing, by TV, by the arts. In our day most people spend much more time before the TV than they ever do in church, and are more influenced by it. A third is by engaging in the discussion of current social and ethical issues where so often the voice of the Church is hardly heard. A fourth is through the great variety of extra-liturgical preaching such as retreat conferences, days of renewal, workshops, etc. which provide extensive opportunities to reach people at their most thoughtful. Finally, there is evangelization in the strict sense, reaching out to the unchurched. These and many other ways open to all who have talents for them and undergo the proper preparation. As has already been shown, not every Dominican must him or herself actually engage in the Ministry of the Word,

because there is need for many auxiliary tasks without which this Ministry is impossible. Among these are also works of charity such as the care of the poor, the sick, and the neglected, which Jesus Himself performed as the necessary first step for opening people to hear the Word. However, for these to be properly part of the Dominican mission they need to be closely linked to its principal Ministry of the Word, because “the harvest is great, but the laborers are few” (Matt 9:37), and the Order ought not to be distracted from its mission. Thus a truly Dominican spirituality leads all members of the Dominican family to seek the opportunities open to them and not waste energy in dreaming about what they would do in other circumstances. We must remember that St. Dominic all his life hoped to go to the missions of the East, but never allowed this to neglect the people actually intrusted by the Church to his care.

The Spirituality of the Dominican Laity

We come at last, after considering how the Dominican Family has come about, to the question of how the spirituality of St. Dominic applies in a special way to members of the Dominican laity who do not take vows, but live in the world and minister to it as part of its daily life. Vatican II made it clear that we are living in a time when it is no longer possible or even right that the ordained ministry should monopolize the active service of the Church. Rather it is the task of the ordained ministry to activate the ministry of the non-ordained, who can no longer be merely passive members of the Church but must share actively in its God-given mission.

Basic to the spirituality of the Dominican Laity, as of all members of the Dominican Family, must be commitment to Our Lord Jesus Christ. This commitment, of course is common to all baptized Christians. but Dominicans are committed to Him precisely as He is God's Truth, as the Word of God revealing the Father to the world in the Spirit. This implies also devotion to Our Lady as Mother of the Word who is our model in contemplating this Eternal Truth as He has become visible to us in the events of His life and especially in His Passion and Resurrection. All Dominicans must in some degree, and according to the situation of their life, share in this contemplation of the Word. As we have seen this is the whole life of Dominican nuns and their special contribution to the Order, Also some members of the Dominican Laity find themselves called principally to this contemplative share in the work of the Order. They pray and undertake works of penance (as did St. Catherine of Siena and many of our saints) in order that the

Ministry of the Word may flourish in the Church and that all human beings may come to hear the Word of the Gospel and accept it.

That this love of the Word of God may really flourish and grow in our hearts members of the Dominican Laity must share in **study** of the Word of God. They can do this privately by the study of the Bible and the reading of theological and spiritual works written by Dominicans and by other authors of merit. Furthermore, they can promote and share in joint efforts at study conducted by the chapter to which they belong or set up on a larger scale. In such study efforts the aim should be to achieve a mature understanding of the Church's teaching, avoiding what is merely faddish or one-sided, and seeking what is both in accordance with the Magisterium and the best of scholarship. Of special importance today is an **ecumenical** attitude which seeks to establish Christian unity, and an **evangelical** attitude which seeks to understand and serve the needs of our modern world.

For those whose talents, education, and life situation makes it possible, such study opens the way to many forms of the Ministry of the Word, to a share in the Church's preaching office in so far as this is open to the non-ordained. The Laity because they are in constant contact with the problems of today's world are especially in a position to understand the needs of that world and to establish communication with it. While the ordained preacher must especially devote himself to liturgical preaching for the faithful, the Dominican Laity are free for a much more wide ranging evangelization of a world that hungers for truth, but cannot find it.

Even those members of the Dominican Laity who do not have a local chapter to which they can affiliate or who are unable to attend meetings, nevertheless share in the community spirit of the Order. By their prayers and their own witness and apostolate they contribute to what the Order was founded to achieve and they share in the prayers and heritage of the Order. Those who belong to a chapter and attend its meetings can find in other Dominicans the mutual support so important to advance in prayer and study, and opportunities for joint, cooperative efforts in the Ministry of the Word. Each chapter is in the hands of its members whose initiative and creativity in finding ways to help each other and projects of ministry must be their responsibility. Those who are married will find in their chapters a stimulus to make their own family life a genuine Christian community in which the Word of God is contemplated, fostered, and put into practice. Those who are single will find friendship and an inspiration to live in the spirit of the evangelical

counsels. All will encourage each other in the practice of personal discipline and penance so necessary for advance in the following of Christ.

It should be noted that Dominican spirituality lays no stress on special devotions or peculiar practices. Because it seeks to contemplate Jesus as the Word, the Truth of God, the Wisdom of God, it wants to see that Truth in its wholeness, its simplicity, free from everything that is one-sided, fanciful, or extraordinary. This Gospel simplicity and honesty, however, does not mean that Dominican spirituality is lacking in poetry and warmth. The Truth it seeks is Jesus Christ Himself and it seeks Him in the Holy Spirit who is Love. No one has said it better than St. Catherine of Siena, herself a member of the Dominican Laity:

O eternal Godhead!You are a fire always burning but never consuming, you are a fire consuming in your heat all the soul's selfish love; you are a fire lifting all chill and giving light. In your light you have made me know your truth. You are the light beyond all light who gives the mind's eye supernatural light in such fullness and perfection that you bring clarity even to the light of faith. In that faith I see that my soul has life, and in that light receives you who are Light. In the light of faith I gain wisdom in the wisdom of the Word your Son; in the light of faith I am strong, constant, persevering; in the light of faith I have hope: It does not let me faint along the way. This light teaches me the way, and without this light I would be walking in the dark.

(Dialogue, 167)

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