

Lay Dominican Formation Program Province of Saint Joseph

Novitiate - Session 2 History of the Dominican Order, Especially the Laity

Introduction of the Theme of This Session

THEME: The Dominican laity was formed when the pope requested the Dominican friars to give spiritual direction to lay groups who were devout, eager to preach and reform the times, but who had little religious training. The Church eventually completely discouraged the laity from preaching, and encouraged a form of spirituality for Lay people that was based on trying to live monastic practices in a secular environment. Vatican II reaffirmed the full vocation of the laity, and the Dominican laity are working on ways to adapt themselves to the new possibilities.

Background to Theme

In reviewing the life of St. Dominic, we saw that he himself did not establish Laity chapters as such. In this session, we shall see how members of the laity gradually came under the spiritual direction of the Dominican friars who were instructed by Rome to give spiritual direction and instructions to those members of the laity who were active and eager to preach but not well instructed in their faith.

By 1286, when the first rule for the Laity was written, the active apostolate of preaching by the laity was not allowed. But laity interested in a deep personal relationship with God continued to join the Dominican Laity and live a dedicated life similar in spirit to the First and Second Orders. (The terms "first Order" and "second order" are used to designate the friars and brothers, and the cloistered nuns. The terms were in effect until after Vatican II. The "Third Order" of the Dominican family referred to the Sisters in active apostolates and to lay Dominicans.)

In the 20th century, and especially after Vatican II, a *new* vision for the Dominican Laity is being forged, a vision that incorporates the original spirit and charisms of the Order with the lay life. Vatican II said:

"Our baptism is meant not only to benefit ourselves but also to give Him praise and to increase His Church. The mission of the whole Christian people with respect to the Church and the world is to work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. ... especially by the testimony of lives lived in faith, hope, and charity. (Dogmatic Constit. No. 31 and 33).

"Within the Church there are many religious families. Advancing the progress of their members and the welfare of the whole body of Christ, these religious families give their members greater stability in their way of life, a proven method of acquiring perfection, fraternal association in Christ, and liberty strengthened by obedience (Dogmatic Constitution. No. 43)"

Europe at the Time Dominic Founded the Order

Some of the characteristics of Europe during Dominic's time are:

- o Many lay groups desired to reform the Church and preach to the people. Some were loyal and faithful to the Church, like St. Francis and his followers, but some were heretical (sometimes unknowingly) like the "Humiliati" and the Albigensians.
- o Southern France was in a state of heresy led by penitential, ascetic Albigensians, who based their asceticism on contempt and hatred of the human body and all material things: only the "spirit" was good. This was the heresy Dominic fought.
- o Enormous changes were occurring in society and the Church. The old feudal system was breaking up. Peasants were moving into the cities. The traditional duties and responsibilities that had defined their ethical behavior no longer had application. Trade guilds were forming in the new, unexplored urban environment. Many of the great cathedrals were being built. Society was in a ferment of change.
- o In England, in 1215, King John signed the Magna Charta, giving the nobility some rights once reserved to the King. This successful limitation on the rights of kings paved the way for the development of Parliament, and eventually, our government by elected representatives.
- o But what did this social turmoil and political rebellion imply about duties to Christ the King?? How did one live a Christian life in a brand new environment, where it wasn't always clear what was expected of you as a Christian, or what you could expect from your neighbor.

The Dominican Response

A. "Response" as a Aspect of Dominican Spirituality

Dominic responded to the needs of his time as he saw them. This responsiveness - you might even say this "responsibility - ability to respond" - comes about from contemplative prayer which is so much a characteristic of Dominic and the charism of his family.

By learning to be still and to listen to God in contemplative prayer, you acquire the skill to-really listen to your neighbor. Dominic found his "neighbors" in the people in southern France who were misunderstanding the teachings of Christ, and suffering in the Albigensian heresy. Dominic responded to the needs of his neighbors by giving his life in service to them and founding an order that would preach Truth - veritas - for all time to come.

His response was new, suited to the times, yet deeply rooted in the Church and Scripture. Like Scripture says, he brought "out of his treasure both the new and the old". By listening to God and our neighbor, we too can service the needs of our neighbor wisely. We will not be stuck in dead traditions, and we will not be adrift amidst the turmoil of our times.

B. In Dominic's Day (again, just a quick review)

Dominic founded an Order of Preachers, but he kept them closely associated with the Church. His Order was governed by a "prior" - "first among equals" - not an "abbot" ("father"), and the prior was not elected for life. The government of the Order was by the General Chapter, a representative group that met every year. This representative form of government provided an environment that fostered maturity and self-reliance in the friars, and that encouraged them to develop their talents for the good of the community. Their ideal of obedience was intelligent and reasoned obedience given by a mature adult, not the blind obedience given by unquestioning children.

Dominic's spirituality emphasized the goodness of the earth and created things and people. (Didn't God take flesh and dwell among us? Didn't He lay down His life for us?) The joy and love that comes from such truths was characteristic of Dominic, and they still influence the prayer, study, apostolate, and community lifestyle of Dominicans to this day.

C. In the Early Years of the Order

Jordan of Saxony was the second Master General, following Dominic. He was Master General for over 20 years. Thousands of people joined the Order, many houses were established in university towns, many missionaries were sent to the Tartars and other tribes in eastern Europe. Monasteries of nuns were being founded and they flourished. Especially in Germany, where several monasteries of women became famous for holiness and learning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

D. The Church and the Laity

The Church eventually discouraged any lay preaching, and she urged Dominican friars to be the spiritual directors for the existing active and apostolic lay groups. The groups that came under the tutelage of the Dominican friars were the first chapters of Dominican Laity. -

In 1286 the first Rule for lay Dominicans was written. This Rule, founded after lay preaching was discouraged, already provided a framework more for individual spiritual development than for an active apostolate. It was translated into various languages, provided essentially the same Rule for all lay Dominicans throughout the world. It was relatively unchanged until 1923, when it was adapted to the new Canon Laws of 1917. It was not changed again until 1967, when the adaptations to Vatican II began.

During those many centuries, many men and women followed the Rule and Constitutions to live a life of personal holiness and commitment to God. People like St Catherine of Siena, and many others whose sanctity will be known only after the final judgment.

Priests, too, could belong to the Third Order of St. Dominic. Rev. Louis de Montfort, who revived the Rosary and Marian devotion in France in the 1700's, and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen were among the priests of the Dominican Third Order.

Dominican Laity - Summary

Today many people want to experience Christian community. They want a deeper prayer life, and instruction on their faith, especially Scripture. For some, the Dominican ways of prayer, study, community and apostolate answer those needs/hopes.

If you choose to make procession and join this family, you become a full-fledged member. If you wonder what it would be like to be a Dominican, study the lives of Dominican saints. They were shaped by the Dominican charisms we've been talking about. If we let ourselves equally be shaped, we can, in our own way, reach out to deepen our faith, enrich our lives, and creatively contribute to our world, as they did to theirs.

Recommended Reading

- The readings recommended in the first session.
- The Dominicans: a Short History by William Hinnebusch, O.P.

Dominican Personalities

Dominicans show a variety of personalities and interests. You could recreate the history of the Dominican Order, Europe, and the emerging Third World by studying members of the Dominican family, so broadly did they answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" that Jesus answered in the parable of the Good Samaritan. As you read about them, study your own feelings. Do you admire these Dominicans? Do you feel to some degree the same concerns? Do you feel enriched as you read some of the things they wrote? If so, you probably will feel at home as a member of the family. Present-day Dominicans may not all be such outstanding saints as these famous ones, but you'd be surprised (or would you?) how many very special people you'll meet.

Some outstanding Dominicans in the past are:

- o In the 12th century
 - St Dominic himself, Bl. Reginald (who had a vision of our Lady, who gave him the habit for the Order), Bl. Diana, Cecelia, and Amata, nuns in one of the first monastery of Dominican nuns, St. Stephen, the first martyr, Bl. Jordan of Saxony, the second master-General of the Order.
- o In the 13th century
 - Raymond of Penyafort, who, like Dominic, was first a canon, then a Dominican. At the pope's command, he prepared a collection of existing canon law, he was an

earl.7 Master-General of the order, and a peacemaker among feuding families and cities.

- Thomas Aquinas, the great teacher, scholastic, and mystic, wrote many theological papers and the standard theological text, the SUMMA THEOLOGICA
- Albert the Great, Thomas's teacher, had encyclopedic interests; wrote over 1000 works on the natural sciences, music, art, and theology.

o In the 14th century

- Catherine of Siena, active mystic, wrote "The Dialog" containing conversation and instruction by the Father to an inquiring soul. She was an intrepid peacemaker between warring towns and classes in Italy and she forcefully . counselled the pope to return to Rome from Avignon, where the popes had resided for 70 years.
- Raymond of Capua, Catherine's spiritual director and Master-General of the Order at the time of the Schism in the Church when there were two popes. He supported the pope in Rome, the pope generally acknowledged as the legitimate pope.
- St. Vincent Ferrar, charismatic preacher, from Spain, toured.. Europe with thousands of followers, preaching repentance. He was called and considered himself the "angel of the Apocalypse." He supported the pope living in Avignon! And the Church canonized him anyway!

o In the 15th century

- St. John Dominici, leader of reform in Italy, trying to offset the abuses caused by the papal Schism, the Black Death that devastated Europe, and the laxity among the clergy.
- St. Antoninus, prior of the convent in Florence where Fra Angelico and Savanarola lived, later Archbishop; he was a moral theologian, an historian, and a teacher; wrote many letters of instruction and encouragement to nuns
- Fra Angelico, the artist who painted beautiful scenes from Scripture on the walls of the Dominican priories/convents around Florence.
- (By the way, it was a Dominican Archbishop, Diego de Deza, who sponsored Christopher Columbus at the court of Ferdinand and Isabella! And Dominicans were already teaching at the university at Salamanca about the roundness of the earth.)

o In the 16th century

- Pope (St.) Pius V, the pope shortly after the Council of Trent and at a time when the Moslem Turks were invading eastern Europe. He worked for the reform of the clergy,

and reintroduced the Rosary devotion. During the naval Battle of Lapanto between Christians and Turks, he prayed and urged others to pray the Rosary, and Our Lady is credited with giving the victory to the Christians.

- St. John of Gorcum, martyred with 18 other Catholics at the hands of Protestants, during the bloody religious wars in Europe between Protestants and Catholics.
 - Bartholomew de las Casas, a missionary in the 1600s who defended the Africans being brought to the New World as slaves.
 - St Louis Bertrand, novice master and later missionary with the Spanish in the New World.
 - Bl. Bartholomea Bagnesi and Bl. Osanna of Cattaro, lay Dominicans; in Spain, another lay member was Louisa Borgia, called "the saintly duchess", the sister of St. Francis Borgia.
- o In the 17th century
- St. Rose of Lima, mystic and ascetic; St. Martin de Porres, lay brother and mystic, who was a great friend and helper of the poor - New World saints from Peru.
 - St Louis de Montfort, French priest and Third Order member, who preached widely on the "true devotion to the Bless Virgin Mary", and advanced the Rosary devotion.
 - Bl. Alphonse Navarette, missionary martyred in Japan in 1617.
 - Bl. Francis Capillas, missionary and first martyr in China in 1649.
- o In the 18th century
- This was a time when the Dominican government became more centralized (just like the governments of Europe), life went on much as before, but there was a certain stagnation. missions continued, some sisters and nuns went to foreign lands, but mostly, in this time before the French Revolution, the order looked too much to the past.
- o In the 19th century
- Pere Lacordaire, who re-established the Dominican Order in France after the disastrous anti-clericalism of the Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic days.
 - Dominic Fenwick led a group of four Dominicans to the U.S., to the pioneer state of Kentucky.
 - Several groups of priests, Dominican laity, and lay Catholics were martyred in IndoChina, and many of these individuals have been beatified. Vietnam had a flourishing Dominican community before the war, and the community still struggles to

maintain an existence.

- Bl. Bartolo Longo, a lay Dominican in Italy, who founded many homes for homeless children-and was an outstanding spokesman for the Catholic faith at a time when that was not a popular stance.

- o In the 20th century
 - Pere LeGrange, French pioneer of Biblical scholarship and founder of the Ecole Biblique, which produced the widely acclaimed Jerusalem Bible, among other major scholarly works.

 - Maisie Ward, career woman of 20th Century America, co-founder of the Sheed and Ward Publishing Co., a highly respected publishing house for Catholic authors.

 - Yves Congar, Marie Dominic Chenu, Edward Schillebeeckx, were among the fifty Dominicans who participated in Vatican Council II as bishops and theologians. There are many, many Dominican authors of many, many influential works today, as well as many, many missionaries.

 - The Maryknoll Sisters, established for missionary work in the far east in the 20th century, who live a Rule based on the Dominican Rule. The Rule was chosen because it was the most flexible of the Rules for women's congregations at that time.

 - Rev. Norbert Wendell, who gave spiritual leadership to Dominican laity in New York City for many years, and also conducted a television program there.

 - and..... ?

Dominicans rarely call attention to the contributions they make and rarely initiate the process to declare a person blessed or a saint. It may seem this list is boastful, but it intended more to show the rich variety of vocations fostered by Dominican spirituality.

There have been controversial figures also. Thomas Aquinas was in trouble in his day. Henry Suso and Meister Eickert preached a way of praying and living that supported German mysticism, but which also caused their works to be banned for a time. Savonarola, in Florence in the 1400s, was burned at the stake by the civil authorities for preaching against the decadent influences of the Renaissance. .Dominicans who participated in the Spanish Inquisition have been maligned for centuries. Today, theologians Yves Congar and Schillebeeckx were Periti (theological consultants to bishops at Vatican II), yet they have been silenced for a time and their writings put under close scrutiny; they have come through the examination process still in union with the Church. So, if you join the Dominican family, you join a family of strong, loving personalities, who were willing to risk a lot for their neighbors, but who treasure loyalty to the

pope and the Church.

Dominican tradition tells of the vision Dominic had of his vast family: he saw the courts of heaven peopled with many religious, but none of his own and he began to weep. "Why do you weep so bitterly?" our Lord asked him, "I have given your Order to My mother." Then our Lady opened her mantle, seemingly as vast as the heavens, and there beneath it was an immense multitude of Dominican religious.