

***THE DOMINICAN COOPERATOR BROTHER
RE- VISIONING THE VOCATION AND MINISTRY OF THE COOPERATOR
BROTHER FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM***

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"Preaching is the substance of my life and my being. "

Yves Congar, O.P

A FORWARD-LOOKING OVERVIEW

The task assigned to me is indeed a challenging one. Though I would never claim to be an expert in theology I can bring to this discussion forty-five years of experience in Dominican life and ministry as a cooperator brother. I am indeed grateful for having been afforded the privilege to prepare this paper for consideration by the Commission.

In developing this paper, I have decided not to recall the anthropology of the cooperator brother in our Order. The work of the Commission on the Cooperator Brothers, established by the General Chapter at Providence (2001) which presented its report to the General Chapter at Krakow (2004) offers a substantive account of the history of the vocation and ministry as well as a report on the Commission's research as it prepared for the Krakow Chapter. I commend the Commission for its work and the thoroughness of the content of its report. Before offering what I believe is a very sound program to address the issues identified by the recent Commission and the findings of our own research in the Province of St. Joseph, permit me to offer these reflections.

OUR CLERICAL NATURE-INTRINSIC VS. ATTRIBUTED

One of the topics which often emerge in discussions on the vocation and ministry of cooperator brothers, especially when new contemporary changes with the framework of the renewal of the Order are envisioned, is the substantive matter of the clerical nature of our Order. It has been my experience as a Dominican that this question is not of real concern among cooperator brothers. Though I speak for myself here, it is the intrinsic clerical nature and character of the Order, rather than an attributed clerical nature and character that give our Order its uniqueness and charism in the ministry of the whole Church. To nullify any unfounded ideas or attributed motivations in my thinking over the years, I have never advocated for a change in the intrinsic character and identity of our Order in the past nor would I support a change in the future. The intrinsic clerical nature and character of our Order is essential to the very identity of our Dominican life and mission. To set it aside or to diminish this character threatens the Order as a whole.

I firmly believe that we ought not to continue to deliberate on the intrinsic clerical character of our Order. Our efforts on behalf of cooperator brothers will achieve greater results if we address the contemporary attitudes and behaviors, particularly attributed characteristics, which threaten to erode our full participation in our common life and ministry and then

design and implement interventions to root out the causes that threaten the seminal gifts cooperators bring to the Holy Preaching.

As Friars in the Order of Preachers, we as cooperator brothers preach from a wide variety of pulpits. The privilege and right to do the Holy Preaching comes to us through our consecrated life as Friars of the Order of Preachers. Any barriers, e.g. canonical, constitutional, cultural, sociological, that interfere with the freedom to exercise this ministry need to be eliminated. The power of God's Word in the life of the world is desperately needed now more than ever in our lifetime. We must envision the preferred future for the cooperator brother in our Order and do as Jesus directed of his apostles: "Go forth into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15).

In some Provinces and communities and in the minds of more than a few priest brothers antiquarian beliefs on the historical ministries of cooperator brothers paralyze the development of a renewed vision for the vocation of cooperator brothers. Unfortunately these beliefs are found in friars across the age continuum - young and old alike. Some beliefs emerge from an unwillingness to change and to embrace an authentic renewal of our Order; others represent indifference to the vocation of the cooperator brothers perhaps due to the absence of brothers in some Provinces, still others emerge from a misinterpretation of the authority and ministry attributed to ordained friars. In some segments of our Order and in the wider Church as well, this misinterpretation has expanded beyond the ministry of cooperator brothers. It now touches the role of non-ordained in ministries of the Church resulting in the development of a growing culture where the conferral of Sacred Orders is seen as a legitimizing ecclesiastical power and control over others, especially the non-ordained. Men seeking Dominican life where brothers live together in unity for the sake of the mission have expressed wonderment if what we claim is in fact the lived experience for all men called Friars of the Order of Preachers. Exclusiveness can be found in many forms of our communication, i.e. language, discussions, written materials, and regrettably in some of our preaching. These attitudes and behaviors are in conflict with the intrinsic clerical nature and identity of our Order as envisioned by St. Dominic. These attitudes and behaviors, if allowed to persist, will destabilize Dominican life and mission and threaten the intrinsic nature and character of our Order envisioned by St. Dominic. As stated in the ACTS of the General Chapter of Bologna (1998): "Because it is the whole community which preaches, we cannot neglect this vocation within our Order without weakening our mission and community life (Chapter IV, 1.2.)."

Acknowledging the existence of barriers and beliefs which have inhibited the vocation and ministry of cooperator brothers, I believe we are firmly on the cusp of a cultural shift which can positively and dramatically influence the desire of men to seek the consecrated life as cooperator brothers especially in third world countries. We as an Order and our Provinces must not be hesitant to root out the remaining vestiges and artificial barriers in our Constitutions, in Canon law, in our customs and practices which continue to inhibit the freedom and full expression of the Dominican vocation among men called to the life as cooperator brothers. Some of these barriers and beliefs will die with those who hold them; others must be named, challenged and then changed. We must not hesitate to move forward strategically and to support new initiatives that preserve and protect the intrinsic character of our Order, that capture the torch of vitality for the fullness of Dominican life of cooperator brothers so that the next generation of Dominican cooperator brothers will bear authentic witness in the society and culture of the Third Millennium that needs to hear, to understand and to cooperate with God's Word.

PROPOSED THESES

I offer the following theses which I believe are at the heart of the challenge before us:

- a. Is the attributed contemporary interpretation and application of the clerical character of the Order misguided and inconsistent with Dominic's vision of the intrinsic character of the Order?
- b. Does the attributed contemporary interpretation of the clerical character of our Dominican life promote or enable the phenomenon of power over others, the oppression and marginalization of persons, and the fostering of exclusiveness over the non-ordained, i.e. cooperator brothers, religious women, the laity? Should not the clerical character of our Order promote the vision of Christ to those we serve rather than alienate them from this vision?
- c. Does the attributed contemporary interpretation of the clerical character of the Order enable or diminish the life of cooperator brothers as collaborators in mission with their priest brothers?
- d. Teachings from the following documents are valuable guides to our authentic renewal and re-visioning of the vocation and ministry of the cooperator brother in the Third Millennium. As Dominican Friars how are these teachings to be applied to our fraternal life in the Third Millennium, to guide an authentic renewal, to promote human flourishing in community and in mission and to serve as a magnet to welcome new brothers?
 - d. 1. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exortation, *Christifidelis laici*, December 30, 1988;
 - d.2. John Paul II, Encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio*, December 7, 1990;
 - d.3. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exortation, *Vita Consecrata*, March 25, 1996;
 - d.4. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Instruction, *Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*, May 19, 2002;
 - d.5. Carlos Azpiroz Costa, *Let Us Walk In Joy and Think of Our Saviour*" May 24, 2003.
 - d.6. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Co-Workers in in the Vineyard*, 2006
- e. How are we to respond to our contemporary culture within Dominican communities and in the world and to the effects it is having on the ministry of the cooperator brother and on future vocations, specifically in the areas of mission, recruitment, formation, governance and ministry inspired by St. Dominic?
- f. Consistent with the intrinsic clerical character of our Order, what bold initiatives ought to be implemented to assure the authentic re-founding of the vocation and ministry of the cooperator brothers for a preferred future for men called to Dominican life as cooperator brothers? Are we genuinely committed to this authentic renewal and re-founding?

These are indeed complex questions which ought to be an integral part of any examination on the vocation and ministry of the cooperator brothers in our Order.

General Chapters as early as Madonna dell' Arco have explicitly declared in clear and challenging terms the intrinsic dignity of the personhood of the men who responded to God's call to join our Order as cooperator brothers. Many historic legislative changes have brought cooperator brothers into the mainstream of Dominican life. Yet still more needs to be accomplished. While legislative changes have positive effects on the integration of the life of all brothers in community, they alone cannot expect to influence the human dynamics of the essence of Dominican life - brothers living together with one mind and one heart, proclaiming the Gospel of mercy - the primary mission of the community. Motivation of the heart and mind cannot be legislated.

I submit, then, that the contemporary application of the clerical character of our Order and how it affects our fraternal life and ministry remains the central issue to be resolved. It is not the clerical character, per se, that diminishes the value of personhood, or threatens the identity and dignity of cooperator brothers; rather it is in its faulty understanding, interpretation and application of how this unique character, conceived by St. Dominic himself, can enrich our fraternal life in mission.

SUGGESTED INTERVENTIONS

We are now at another strategic moment where representatives of the whole Order are gathered here in this Commission. It is now time for a radical transformation of our traditional understanding and past experiences of the person of the one called "brother cooperator" to a new model called, the "Dominican Brother."

Each year, each decade, each millennium has its own challenges to which we ought to respond. At this moment in our history, I offer these challenges:

1. To systematically remove all artificial barriers that in any way prevent or restrict the recruitment, formation, developmental and apostolic ministry of cooperator brothers as consecrated religious to fully experience Dominican life and mission. These barriers may be found in antiquarian attitudes and expectations of individuals and communities, in exclusive language (oral and written), behaviors, and decisions, in restricted vocation and recruitment policies and media materials, in formation and academic programs, policies, procedures and guidelines that inhibit integration and appropriation into the fullness of Dominican life and mission, in our Constitutions, ACTS of Provincial Chapters, and in canon law.
2. Understanding the multivariate differences which are present in some provinces (i.e. cultural diversity; the vitality of the consecrated life; new forms of ministry; the growth of vocations), that formation programs and magnet contemporary apostolic ministries which respond to the needs of the world around us and on the new frontiers of the Order, be designed and implemented. Human and financial resources ought to be made available to achieve this objective. Such programs should continue to be highlighted in the I.D.I.
3. Where feasible, regional provinces should be encouraged to collaborate in formulating appropriate recruitment, vocation, formation programs and apostolic ministries which can respond to the growing interests of men seeking Dominican life as consecrated religious.

4. In light of the currently high degree of vulnerability and serious risks to the long term viability of the vocation of the cooperator brothers in our Order, and the commentaries of several recent General Chapters on the diminishment of the Order's Mission in the absence of the Brothers, that an Assistant to the Master of the Order for the Brothers be appointed. This Assistant should be a cooperator brother of the Order and will have the responsibility to facilitate and advocate for the development and implementation of new models of recruitment, formation and ministries for the Brothers of the Order. If an Assistant is not practical then one of the present staff of the Curia ought to be assigned this designated responsibility.

A NEW VISION

We in the Province of St. Joseph, having carefully studied the vocation and ministry of the cooperator brothers have developed and implemented a new vision for the vocation, formation and ministry of Dominican cooperator brothers. Built upon the teachings in the documents cited earlier we believe this program is the authentic expression of the mission and charism of our Order in light of the needs of the Church of the Third Millennium. We offer this new vision to the Commission and to the whole Order so that it might serve as one model for other provinces.

THE DOMINICAN COOPERATOR BROTHER PREACHING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD

A BROTHER'S CALL: WHO WE ARE

Cooperator brothers in the Order of Preachers are consecrated men religious who believe their vocation is rooted in baptism. Dominican brothers are men who have freely, without condition or limitation, heard and responded to God's call to come preach with Him. In responding to this call Brothers believe that the lived expression of the Dominican vocation, through the vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, is centered in, and radically dependent on a common life devoted to prayer and liturgy, study and scholarship, preaching and other ministries, and especially by caring for one another.

As men called to embrace Dominican life as non-ordained friars, Brothers are committed, courageous, free, happy and holy. As spiritual persons within the human experience, Brothers freely endure suffering and loss and willingly become vulnerable in their personal transformation in order to integrate and then to share the Gospel Message of healing with their brothers in their communities and then with the world.

The vocation of the Dominican Brother is at the core of Dominican life. His vocation is centered in his universal call to holiness and his mission within that call to bring himself and others into an intimate relationship with Jesus. This remarkable vocation, a mystery unfolding, provides a unique witness that all Dominican Friars, both ordained and non-ordained, are first and foremost consecrated religious bound together as Friars by their common religious profession in a Dominican vocation. It is religious profession that makes the Friars full, unlimited and unrestricted inheritors of Dominic's vision and the charism of our Order, expressed in our contemporary world. All are brothers of St. Dominic but called to different ministries.

A BROTHER'S MINISTRY: How WE PREACH

The consecrated identity of Dominican Brothers is actualized in their vocation by living the mission of the Province and the worldwide mission of the Friars of the Order of Preachers. The 1998 General Chapter at Bologna, as well as several earlier General Chapters, reiterated that the ministry of Dominican Brothers flows from their dignity as persons, and as Dominicans. The delegates reiterated the vital importance of the Brothers' vocation and ministry in the Order. In the proceedings of the Chapter, the delegates stated unequivocally:

Since it is the whole community which preaches, the Order's mission and community life is weakened in the absence of our Brothers. Proclaiming the good news to people and in places that others cannot reach is the special charism of the Dominican Brother.

The ministry of Dominican Brothers, conjoined with that of their priest-brothers, is the dynamic expression of St. Dominic's vision. It empowers Brothers to enter into the lives of people and travel to places wherever the Holy Preaching is desperately needed, especially where their priest-brothers have not yet entered.

The life and ministry of Dominican Brothers is exciting, challenging and life-giving because it is imbued and driven by the power of God's Word. The Brothers' life-long commitment through the vows and regular observance together with their various ministries cooperate with this Word to transform their own hearts and minds, as well as those of their brothers in community and all those to whom they are sent. Preaching from many pulpits, Brothers respond - not merely with words - but with the Word of God that lives in their hearts. Brothers can be found in ministry in many areas, for example, evangelization, education, research, fund-raising and development, administration in Catholic higher education, management of Dominican facilities and community services, nursing and health care, health care ethics, retreat and social work, parish and pastoral ministries, caring for the poor and marginalized in our cities and in foreign lands.

Emphasizing the gifts and talents of the person, the ministry of the Brother is given full expression and lived out in response to the needs of his community and the Church. Dominican Brothers, like their priest brothers, are called by Divine Providence to be contemplative preachers in the Third Millennium and are, by profession, committed and obligated to the Holy Preaching, to one another and to the whole world.

CALLED TO PREACH

As Brothers of the Order, we share fully without limitations, the privilege and the responsibility to announce the Kingdom of God to all those yearning for and needing His message of salvation in their lives. As Dominicans, with every breath, every action, every suffering, every joy, we are preaching God's message of salvation, a message of hope, a message of enduring love for all of us. This is the Dominican Moment!

Pope John Paul II has called us to embrace the new evangelization in mission to a changing Church and its faithful. This may well require a radical renewal of our Order and a re-visioning of the vocation and ministry of Brothers of our Order. With courage and confidence in a loving Father who wants only good for His children let us move quickly and confidently from protracted debates to definitive and timely actions and get on with the Holy Preaching, This is our life and our work together.

MODEL FORMATION PROGRAM

RECRUITMENT AND FORMATION: The recruitment and formation of Dominican Brothers consists of the following integrated programs:

1. Recruitment Program: This program is under the jurisdiction of the Director of Vocations and his Assistants with input from the Vocation Council. Men interested in the Brotherhood follow the same discernment process and all application policies and procedures applicable to men interested in pursuing a priestly vocation in the Province except in those instances where specific criteria are required for Ordination.
2. The Affiliate Program: Under the direction of the Director of Vocations, men interested in pursuing a vocation are counseled and given direction in discerning their vocation while remaining at home and in their current employment or career activities. The length of this program is variable depending on the needs of the affiliate.

During this program, affiliates are expected to engage in regular reception of the sacraments; take counsel with a spiritual director; participate in a ministry of service in their parishes, campus ministry, etc. and have periodic visits with a Dominican community if reasonably accessible.

At the appropriate time the affiliate is formally presented with an application for admission to the Novitiate. Once accepted for the Novitiate by the Prior Provincial the postulant prepares for the Novitiate by participating in a four week live-in community experience with other postulants who will enter the Novitiate on August 1.

3. The Novitiate: The Novitiate, in common with clerical novices, lasts for twelve months and is located at St. Gertrude Priory in Cincinnati, Ohio. The Novitiate concludes with profession of simple vows for a period of three years and six months.
4. The Ministry Formation Program (MFP): The Ministry Formation Program (post-Novitiate Formation) builds on the religious, spiritual, communal, historical, and personal foundations begun in the Novitiate and continues to prepare Brothers for community life and ministry.

All Brothers will participate in a common core of formation experiences for Dominican life and mission even though they may pursue different tracks (e.g. preaching, the common life, spiritual direction, living the evangelical counsels, liturgy and Prayer, study, pastoral competencies and behaviors of public ministers). Common community and formation experiences, chapters, etc. and opportunities for shared ministries and use of support services will be facilitated for all brothers in formation.

The MFP is five years in length. At least three of these years are spent in the formation community of the Dominican House of Studies. Following solemn profession Brothers may remain at the Dominican House of Studies or be assigned to another community of the province depending upon their studies. An organized and extended pastoral experience of several months is incorporated into the MFP prior to solemn profession (Krakow, 2004. No. 271).

The Master of the Brothers, in collaboration with the Prior Provincial, the Regent of Studies and the Brother himself, will assess the interests and competencies and develop an individualized MFP for each Brother.

The Constitutions of the Order, the Statutes and Acts of the Province, the Ratio Studiorum Particularis (1994) and the Ratio Formationis Particularis (2006) are the governing statutes on the implementation of the Ministry Formation Program.

Ministry Tracks:

Three ministry formation tracks are offered depending on the mission and needs of the Province, the Church, and the gifts and interests of the Brothers. These ministries require an organized period of preparation and study. Several may require earning academic degrees. The ministry tracks are not intended to be rigidly distinct, exclusive, or to suffocate the creative development of the Brother's vocation. Focusing on these three tracks which emerge from the mission of the Order and our Province gives direction to the Brother's MFP which is ordered toward an integral vision of Dominican life and mission.

These ministry tracks (Preaching; Community; Professional) are briefly described as follows:

- a. Preaching Ministries: the focus of this track is on the development of Brothers who are called to minister in religious education programs, catechetical formation, campus and parochial ministries, retreats and workshops, preaching, lay evangelization, pastoral counseling, chaplaincies, international missions, and teaching, etc;
- b. Community Ministries: the focus of this track is on the development of Brothers who are called to minister within Dominican communities and other internal operations of the province. Examples include leadership roles, management and supervision of staff, maintenance and service of buildings and properties, health services, economic administration and management of the communities' assets, food services, environmental, engineering and mechanical services, sacristans and liturgical planners, stewards of shrines, etc;
- c. Professional Ministries: the focus of this track is on the development of Brothers who are called to minister in social work agencies, psychological counseling, health care services, administration and management, finances, pastoral administration, teaching, music, the communications media, artistic design, etc.

Location: The MFP for the Brothers is located at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington. Brothers in the MFP will reside in the same area of the DHOS with other brothers in formation.

Master of Brothers: In order to further develop and protect the identity of the Brothers' vocation and to preserve the integrity of the MFP, Brothers in formation will have their own Master who will have oversight for all Brothers and direct the MFP in collaboration with the Master of Students and the Regent of Studies.

SUMMARY

Reiterating what has been noted earlier, as Brothers of the Order we share fully with our brother priests, without limitations, the privilege and the responsibility to announce the Kingdom of God to all those yearning for and needing His message of salvation in their lives.

As Dominican Friars, a community in mission, we are preaching God's message of salvation, a message of hope, a message of enduring love for one another and all those committed to our care with every breath, every action, every suffering, every joy. Re-emphasizing what has been noted earlier we must develop the authentic vision for the preferred future for the cooperator brother in the Order and do as Jesus directed of his apostles: "Go forth into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation" (Mk 16:15).

Let us not be hesitant in re-visioning and authentically renewing the vocation of the cooperator brothers for ministry in the Third Millennium. Let us work in every way together to heal the narratives of the past, to embrace the Master's challenge of itinerancy in our thinking, in our common life and in our mission as we engage in the authentic renewal of our Order. With courage and confidence in the *Digitus Dei*, bound together through our Solemn Profession in community and in mission, let us move quickly from protracted debates to definitive actions for the sake of the Gospel. Amen!

Ignatius Perkins, OP
Province of St. Joseph
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