

# Dominican Spirituality

Edward Schillebeeckx, OP

---

**F**or the most part people live by stories. I myself live by my own story. When I became a Dominican I linked my life story with the family Story of the Dominicans; as a result, my life story took on a new orientation and I picked up the thread of the story of the Order in my own way. So my own life has become part of the Dominican family story: a chapter in it. Through the story of the Order I have attained my own identity. Stories of the Dominican Order keep us together as Dominicans.



Without stories we should lose our memories, fail to find our own place in the present and remain without hope or expectation for the future. Thus as Dominicans we form a group by virtue of being our own storytelling community, which hands down its own traditions within the wider story of the many religious communities, within the all embracing story of the great community of the church, and within the even greater community of humankind. This makes us our own special family, recognizable from all kinds of family characteristics. Some are major, some are minor, but none of them can be hidden.

In saying this, I have already said something about Dominican spirituality. The story of my life can be my own life story only in so far as it has become a chapter of the Dominican family story. The story of my own life extends and enriches the history of Dominican spirituality, while as a small almost infinitesimally small – almost infinitely small – chapter in it, it is at the same time relativized and criticized by the already older and wider story of the Dominican family. This makes me ask whether I really am not distorting this family story. So I am already others as a norm for Dominican spirituality. Furthermore, thank God, there are still Dominicans alive today. In other words, our story is not yet exhausted, completely told; there is still something to be laid.

A first conclusion already follows from this: a definitive all round definition of Dominican spirituality can not be given. You cannot make a final judgment on a story which is still going strong. We can only trace some of the main line in the plot of the story, which has now been handed down for seven centuries in constantly different ways: the one basic story has been told in countless other languages to constantly different listeners, and has varied depending on their cultural, historical circumstances and the nature of their church.

The basic story which stands at the beginning of our own Dominican storytelling community is of fundamental importance here. But the origin of any relevant story usually blurs into an obscure past which is difficult to reconstruct historically. Dominic (1170-1223), the origin of the Dominican family story, did not write any books. Nevertheless, through laborious historical reconstruction which extracts the "real Dominic" from all kinds of legends (so typical of the Middle Ages), we have sufficient firm ground under our feet. In particular, though Dominic may not have left behind any books or documents, what he did leave behind as a living legacy was the Dominican movement, the Order, a group of people who wanted to carry on his work in his footsteps. The Dominican story therefore begins with Dominic and his first companions; together they stand at the beginning of what was to become the Dominican family story. They gave the story its theme: they set its tone.

However, this story, often retold and sometimes rewritten, is in itself a particular way in which the thread of an already older story, that of Jesus of Nazareth, is taken up and continued in a new manner. This already brings us to a second conclusion. Dominican spirituality is valid only in so far as it takes up the story of Jesus and brings it up to date in its own way. In its Decree on the Renewal of Religious Life, the Second Vatican Council said that "to follow Jesus" is the ultimate and supreme norm of any form of religious life (*suprema regula*, no.2).

Dominican spirituality is therefore subject to the criterion of the sources of all Christian life. This also means that even the Dominican spirituality of Dominic and his first followers is not directly an absolute law for Dominicans. A fuller and more sophisticated knowledge of the story of Jesus which has become possible since then (e.g. through new devotional experiences based on the Bible or through more refined exegesis of scripture) may therefore lead us to different emphases from those of Dominic and his followers. For according to the Council's Decree on Religious Renewal, this renewal must happen in the first place through a return "to the sources of all Christian life" (no.2), the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1.1). That source is never exhausted and always offers new possibilities, for which even Dominic himself did not know the all embracing "Open Sesame".

At the same time this implies that the story of every religious Order must be judged as a part or, better, as a modulation of the greater story of the "community of God", the church ("a participation in the life of the church": *ibid.*, no. 2). Here the Council points to the "present day projects" of the church: biblical, liturgical, dogmatic, pastoral, ecumenical, missionary and social. That is, Dominican spirituality essentially presupposes a critical involvement in the very specific needs and problems of today's church in its historical circumstances; it cannot be an isolated

cultivation of our own "Dominican" garden alongside the ongoing life of the world and the church.

Given all this, however, governed by the gospel and subject to the constant historical criticism that it exercises, and at the same time as a concrete historical feature of the necessary major projects of the church in the world here and now, in fact "the original inspiration of one's own religious institution" (thus the Council's Decree on Religious Life, no.2) is the basic theme of the Dominican family story, and is therefore normative. Here the Council Decree points not only to the original "specific project" (*proprio proposita*) of the founder, but also to the Order's "own religious traditions", at least in so far as these are sound (*sanae traditiones*); that is, to the "spiritual heritage" of a religious order: its spirituality.

The third conclusion may therefore be that Dominican spirituality is valid as a special mode of the church's task "to follow Jesus", especially - for us - in the footsteps and the inspiration of Dominic, as this inspiration has constantly provided new height and direction in the best moments of the history of the Order. Therefore we must clearly bring this basic historical story to mind, for in the course of time the Dominican community has also had a broken relationship to its own origins. When the Inquisition brought, for example, Joan of Arc to the stake, the Dominicans involved were essentially contradicting Dominic's inspiration and orientation. People had become deaf and blind to the origin of new charismata: this was an essentially un-Dominican attitude.

As a third criterion for renewed religious life, the same Decree of the Council gives the relationship of the story of Jesus and the original basic story (for us, of the Dominicans) to the altered circumstances of the time (no. 22). This implies that Dominican spirituality cannot be defined purely by a reference to the original story or purely by a reference to the further modulations and updating of this basic story in the course of the history of the Order, though this is presupposed. Dominican spirituality also involves the way in which we live out this Dominican family story here and now, in our time. Dominican spirituality does not indicate simply how things were "at the beginning" or in the course of the history of the Order. In that case we would simply be writing a historical report of the way in which Dominicans were inspired in former times.

But historical knowledge is not yet spirituality. Thus someone who was a good historian but not a Dominican could reconstruct it better than we could. If it is not to be purely the "history" of a spirituality (and furthermore, if it is not to become an empty ideology), Dominican spirituality is a living reality today; it is handed on (or distorted) by Dominicans living now, who reshape the Dominican family story here and now with an eye to the situation in the world and the church, the cultural historical situation of the moment.

Thus the fourth conclusion runs as follows: without a living relationship to the present, any talk about Dominican spirituality remains a purely historical preoccupation with the part of the Order (often an excuse for neglecting tasks which are urgent now). Dominican spirituality is a living reality which is to be realized among us now. Otherwise we simply repeat stories which others have told for a long time, as though we ourselves did not have to write our own chapter in what is of course a story which had already begun before us. Whereas now we do have to write a new chapter that is still unpublished, if after us anyone else is going to think it worth taking up the thread of this Dominican story again. If in fact we can, may and will write that new living chapter, I am certain that many young people, men and women, will again be drawn to continue the Dominican tradition after us.

For any meaningful story has a power of attraction; it is retold, and no one can stop its snowball effect. Whether that happens, however, depends on the tone in which we write our chapter in the great Dominican family story and the tension it contains. Will it be a dull, unread little paragraph? Or will it be an alien story which does not take up the thread of the family story that has already begun, and so allows the Dominican story to die out, perhaps for good? Or will it become an attractive episode, attractive perhaps only because all that the hearer notices is that we are zealously in search of the real thread of the story, which for the moment we have lost track of? That too can also be an important part of the already old Dominican family story.

A "golden thread" runs through the Dominican family story, from Dominic down to the present day. As may become evident, this golden thread sometimes runs across the fabric of Christianity - a fact that we must not obscure when we are writing our share in the great history of the Order. Provided that this golden thread is woven into our life story, however different it may be in content, we have in fact realized Dominican spirituality. "Spirituality" is not spirituality so long as it is only described, whether in an assertive or an authoritarian tone. It is spirituality to the degree that is realized in practice - as a completely new rendering of an old Dominican melody.

How does this older melody go, this constantly recurring theme, this basic story?

I would say that it is a cross-grained story! In the twelfth century and at the beginning of the thirteenth there were two burning issues: a need for renewal in the priestly life and a need for renewal in the monastic life. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 dealt with the two problems separately, without any relation between them, and without connecting the two. This Council was not without its influence on Dominic who, as an Augustinian canon of Osma, on a journey to the south of France had already gathered round him a group of fellow workers to provide for the pressing needs of priestly care in the diocese of Toulouse, which had severe pastoral problems. Dominic saw the signs of the times. In

the twelfth century, religious movements had arisen: a great many lay people joined them. The basic tendency of these movements was to combine gospel poverty with preaching, but they often had an anti-clerical tone.

All kinds of clerical abuses had prompted the question: does Christian preaching require the permission of the church (the bishop), and involve commissioning and sending by the church? Or is not religious life, and life according to the gospel in the footsteps of the apostles (at that time called the *vita apostolica*), itself a qualification for Christian preaching? This last view was the standpoint of many religious movements, whereas it was officially regarded as "heresy" by the Councils. We could say that the heretical movements of that time were inspired by the gospel and Christ, while the official preachers, though orthodox, did not lead a life in accordance with the gospel - at least to all outward appearances - and were completely embedded in feudal structures. All manifestations of this new religious movement - above all in France, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands (the rich countries of that time) - show striking common features (independently of each other): living out the gospel *sine glossa* (without compromises). Its spirituality was characterized by a deep devotion to the humanity of Jesus: following the poor Jesus. (This happened under the influence of the Cistercian movement and the Gregorian reform.)

At the same time there was clear influence from the contemplative, Greek Byzantine East (through the Crusaders and cloth merchants). The situation became more serious when these gospel movements came into contact with dualistic Eastern movements which arrived in the West through the Slavonic lands of the Danube; they were called Cathars, a collective term for Gnostic and dualistic trends. As a result the whole of the "gospel movement" became even more suspect to the church. The problem became that of saving the gospel movement for the church and mobilizing it against heresy. We must set the phenomenon of Dominic against this historical background of all kinds of enthusiastic revivals of evangelism, but on the periphery of the official church. Dominic was not alone in seeing the problems in the situation: Pope Innocent III, Bishop Diego, with whom Dominic traveled to the south, and Francis of Assisi also saw it. With outspoken realism, Dominic formulated a clear rescue programme.

He saw that an enormous potential for the gospel was being lost to the church. Though trained in the already traditional canonical priestly life, he was nevertheless sympathetic to these new counter-experiments. But he saw quite clearly why they either kept failing (splitting off into "heretical" sects), or came to be incorporated once again into traditional monastic life (e.g. the Premonstratensians). He wanted to make these counter movements authentic alternative forms of the church's evangelism, a church movement: he wanted as it were to "live like the heretics" but "teach like the church".

Evangelism must be a challenge within the church; in other words it must be the church and not a sect. Dominic's own vision came near to this in that he saw the solution of the problems of the time in the combination - in one institution - of apostolic preaching (that is, preaching with a critical remembrance of the need for a proclamation endorsed by the pope or by the episcopate), and the *vita apostolica* (that is, radical evangelism: following Jesus like the apostles). He brought together organically, in one programme, the themes treated separately by the Fourth Lateran Council.

Because this same Council, to some extent contrary to the personal views of Pope Innocent III, had forbidden all new forms of religious life and "banned" unauthorized preaching, Dominic combined the best of traditional monastic life with the basic trends of the new counter movements which had arisen all over Europe and which, to make the Christian proclamation credible, required a life commensurate with the gospel from those who proclaimed it. In so doing he broke down the feudal structures of the old monastic life: thus there arose a new form of religious life, the Order of Preachers, the Dominicans. Hence our earliest constitutions are largely made up of elements from the constitutions of traditional religious life, especially from the Norbertines and Cistercians (at that time the most lively religious institutions). However, Dominic and his first followers transformed these elements by the very purpose of the Order: apostolic itinerant preaching; that is, the new spirit of what were then modern, experimental gospel movements brought into the perspective of the church.

Dominic had been caught up in this spirit through his contact in the south of France with all this heretical gospel enthusiasm, which was shared by a broad spectrum of people, high and low. Through the structure of his Order, Dominic had weakened the economic stability which had been the basic principle of the older monastic institutions. On the basis of a religious criticism Dominic thus attacked the foundations of the feudal system (in church and society). Furthermore, the association of the contemplative monastic element with itinerant preaching resulted in a basic difference from the traditional form of monastic life. The new "corporative" idea (a particular form of organization, as in the official guilds) was adapted to the religious institution: there was no "monarchical" authority from above but a democratic form of government with a range of choices (democratic and personal). Paradoxically, Dominic's evangelism led to a new incarnation in secular structures, especially those of the rising democratic mediaeval bourgeoisie.

By thread and cross-thread, Dominic wove a new fabric, created a new religious programme. Thus the Dominican Order was born from the charisma of the combination of admonitory and critical recollection of the spiritual heritage of the old monastic and canonical religious life with the "modernistic" religious experiment of the thirteenth century.

Dominic had a fine sensitivity both to religious values from the past and to the religious promise for the future emanating from the modern experiments of his time. The Dominican Order was born out of this two fold-charisma. I would say that this is our "gratia originalis", the grace at the origin of our Order.

Dominican spirituality is therefore in the first instance to be defined as a spirituality which, on the basis of admonitory and critical reflection on the heritage left behind by the past religious tradition, takes up critically and positively the cross thread provided by whatever new religious possibilities for the future keep emerging among us. Therefore it can never be a material repetition of what our Dominican forebears have themselves done admirably. Nor, however, can it be an uncritical acceptance of whatever "new movements" (in the mystical or political sense) are now evident in our midst. For Dominic, the essential thing was the question of truth. In his heart Dominic was ultimately one hundred per cent behind the new apostolic experiments of preaching combined with poverty, but remembering the good achievements of the previous patterns of religious life - he unconditionally observed the guidelines laid down by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) for any renewal of both priestly and religious life. His charisma was organically to combine two divergent guidelines and thus personally to extend the aims of this Council.

On the basis of this spirituality, which found expression in our very first Dominican Constitutions, the further history of the spirituality becomes understandable. This brings the historical, changing, cross-grained, new element into the very heart of Dominican spirituality. For example, the Constitutions from the years 1221-31 said: "Our brothers may not study the books of pagan writers (referring above all to Aristotle) and philosophers (what is meant is Arabic philosophy, the great modernism in the Middle Ages); far less may they study the secular sciences."

However, only about twenty years later, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas were to regard the study of secular sciences and the "pagan philosophers" as a necessary condition of the preparation and formation of an appropriate Dominican apostolate. Thus on the basis of an authentic Dominican spirituality these two Dominican saints boldly went against a Dominican constitution set up in earlier times and were therefore in opposition to what was then in fact called official "Dominican spirituality". They did this inspired by what Dominic did in his time so successfully that the definition was later removed from the Constitutions by a General Chapter; indeed, later Constitutions urged Thomas as a model (Raymond of Penafort had centres for the study of Arabic built in Nursia and Tunis).

That is an authentically Dominican development. After the heart of St Dominic, who himself tried to reconcile "the past" and new "possibilities for the future". (This brought with it the new danger that Thomas would later cease to be a beacon pointing towards the future and would become a closed frontier.) If no cross thread can be seen in the story that the Dominican perceives and takes up again himself, there is every chance that Dominican spirituality will fade; worse still, that on the basis of an "established" Dominican spirituality - which is a contradiction in terms - we shall wrongly write off as apocryphal talk new attempts at a truly Dominican spirituality.

The greatest moments in the history of our Order are when at the same time this history becomes anti history or a cross thread: Dominic himself, Albert and Thomas, Savonarola, Eckhardt, de Las Casas, Lacordaire, Lagrange, Chenu, Congar, to name a few. However, at the same time Dominicans have sometimes (in the first instance at least) run into difficulties with the already established Dominican story when in an un-Dominican way it has refused to take up the new cross thread. Without mistaking the fundamental worth, by which we are all supported, of the many anonymous Dominicans who have quietly lived a successful Dominican religious life (though their tranquility can have a broad influence and produce cross-grained stories within the Order), nevertheless it only becomes clear what is typically Dominican when Dominicans sometimes, following the example of Dominic, reshape "the old" and combine it with the dynamism of constantly new and different forms. If this does not happen at regular intervals, then there is every chance that the well known Dominican concern for truth will be dishonoured in an Inquisition and the new "Dominican possibilities" are rejected. These possibilities may then come to life outside the Dominican family. I would not want to include this less rosy story which is also part of our Order - in the golden thread of our family story, which is always in a state of constantly taking up the cross-thread again. However, the cross-thread sometimes ensures the continuity! The history of this cross thread is the golden thread of the Dominican family story, woven into a broader, as it were more serene, whole.

That St Ignatius of Loyola was shut up in the cellars of one of our monasteries because he shocked the people of his time with a new charisma is one of the many stories in which "Dominican spirituality" has perversely become its opposite; it now shows us to be guilty of un-Dominican chauvinism. In other words, this is typical of times in which the Dominicans were no longer "Dominican" and on the basis of their own "established" position had already dubbed the new counter thread heretical. The constantly new forms which Dominican spirituality must take in accordance with Dominic's basic story will emerge even more clearly, precisely through the moments in which we have failed in the past.

It is essential for Dominican spirituality to attend to God as God has already revealed himself to us in the past and to attend to the present day "signs of the times" in which the same God, who is faithful to us, makes his appeal. Any one sidedness in one track, uncritical judgment either of the past or of what prove to be symptoms of the future in the present is un-Dominican. Dominic submits the present, with its own possibilities of experiment, to comparison with

the dangerous recollection of certain events and legacies from the past, just as at the same time he opens up the global past and gives it the stamp of the cross-grained experimental present: it is out of this kind of attitude that the Order was born. This must remain its "genius".

The "présence à Dieu" and the "présence au monde" (as Lacordaire puts it) describe the very nature of Dominican spirituality throughout the history of the Order. And perhaps today we are going to see clearly that in recollection of the religious part the "présence au monde" or critical solidarity with the human world is the only possible mode of our "présence à Dieu". At the same time his insight confirms the need for a critical recollection of the religious past in which the same "présence à Dieu" is always revealed in the communication of what were then the contemporary signs of the time.

The "modernism" of the Dominican Order lives on dangerous memories from the past. After what was almost a centuries long sleep, Père Lacordaire and Master General Jan del were the ones who in the nineteenth century recalled the Dominican Order to its original charisma and brought about a break with the serene traditionalism to which the "established order" had succumbed. "Lacordaire" (and everything connected with that within our Dominican history) was in fact the rediscovery of the Order by itself. For the Lacordaire movement was nourished by the original charisma of the Order and as a result again raised the problem of "Dominican spirituality".

Some characteristics of Dominican spirituality are clear from this:

1. Belief in the absolute priority of God's grace in any human action: the theological direction of the Dominican life and its programme in relation to ethics, the world, society and the betterment of people. There must be no obsessive concern with the self but trust in God: I can trust God more than myself. The result is a tranquil and happy spirituality. God still gives an unexpected future to the limited meaning and scope of my own actions.

2. Religious life in the light of the gospel (*vita apostolica*) as the atmosphere in which the Dominican is apostolic (*salus animarum*, salvation as the aim of the activity of the Order): through preaching in all its forms. The result of that is *contemplari* and *contemplant alios tradere* (i.e. the agreement between what a person proclaims and his own life; here Thomas Aquinas is contrasting the character of the mendicants with that of other religious institutions and at the same time connecting this with "poverty": being free from financial worries). This general mendicant view became typically Dominican through the insertion of study as an essential element into the structure of this Dominican evangelism. This particular element was not characteristic of the mediaeval evangelical movements. "Study is not the aim of the Order but an essential instrument for this work" (says Humbert of Romans in his commentary on the Constitutions).

The failure of many gospel movements was also caused by a lack of thought. Furthermore, while the universities, which were only established at that time, had intensified the element of academic study, at the same time they had concentrated it and centralized it so that there were no intellectuals in the dioceses. Dominic saw this, and therefore incorporated study as an institutional element in the very organization of his Order. He would not have any monastery founded "without a doctor in theology", and every monastery had to be a "school of theology": a Dominican monastery is "permanent instruction". The distinction between study monasteries and pastoral monasteries is un-Dominican; both must be monasteries for study and pastoral ministry. Thomas Aquinas defended a religious institution "founded for study".

3. The "Jesus spirituality" of the order - the "humanity of Jesus" (Albert, Thomas, Eckhardt, Tauler, Suso, etc., here directly connected with the only two Dominican devotions, to Mary and to Joseph), but this humanity experienced as a personal manifestation of God's joy for humankind - is the centre of Dominican spirituality and mysticism without any predilection for "derivative devotions". All this is typical of the twelfth century; along with all the other characteristics it is also typically Dominican.

4. « Présence au monde » (« la grâce d'entendre ce siècle », as Père Lacordaire says) : openness for constantly new charismata which different circumstances require of us. Hence the need for structures which do not hem us in but are democratic and flexible, through which it becomes possible for Dominicans to accept the rise of new stories that go against the grain. It is characteristic that the Dominicans never had their Constitutions approved by the pope, so that they themselves could adapt them to new circumstances.

5. (As a consequence of 4.): Since Albert and Thomas, Dominican spirituality has been inwardly enriched by the inclusion of the Christian principle of secularisation within the essentially religious, gospel trend (Dominicans at first rejected this, but soon they generally accepted it). This involves first coming to know things (objects, inter-personal relationships, society) in their intrinsic characteristics and their own structures rather than prematurely defining their relationship to God. In modern times this has enormous consequences by comparison with all kinds of forms of pseudo-mystical supernaturalism, which often ends up as a sense of superiority masquerading as piety.

To begin with, the Order agonized over the introduction of "natural sources" into Dominican evangelism. The traditional rejection of the "profane sciences" by the monks continued to have an effect, though this was limited by

the Dominican principle of dispensation. The first Dominicans were "anti-philosophical" (thus running the risk of an evangelical supernaturalism). The *Vitae Fratrum* reeked of "holy naivety". Albert and Thomas changed the direction, Albert even arguing fiercely against fellow brethren "who thus again want to become the murderers of Socrates". The dispute was over the consequences of integral evangelism, which Albert and Thomas wanted to be enlightened in character, not naive. In the Chapter of Valenciennes (1259), the trend supported by Albert and Thomas won through: the study of the "profane sciences" became compulsory in Dominican training.

6. The other elements: a liturgical choral office, monastic observances and community life, are traditional and generally religious, and in this sense not typically Dominican. That was the dangerous recollection of the monastic and canonical past to which Dominic continued to give expression in his new religious and apostolic programme, albeit in critical, reduced and more modest form.

7. The "principle of dispensation" (historically this seems to go back to Dominic himself in person), i.e. respect for the particular personal charisma of a fellow Dominican within the Dominican community, bearing in mind the purpose of the Order. Of course this is an extremely dangerous principle, which has been abused to disastrous effect. However, Dominic would rather take that risk than give up the human and Christian significance of the dispensation principle because of the threat of abuse. As a general principle this was a completely new Dominican discovery in the Middle Ages. In furtherance of study in the service of the "salvation of men" (*salus animarum*) and in furtherance of the apostolate, it is, paradoxically, possible to be a Dominican (if necessary) on your own. This presupposes having been trained as a Dominican, but it is in no way understood as a matter of standing outside the law: on the contrary, dispensation is a constitutional Dominican law. Conformity is alien to the original Dominican legislation. Even now, this original Dominican principle opens up broad possibilities for "modern experiments" in our time, even experiments which some people accustomed to an "established" Dominican spirituality cannot stand. (However, these experiments also always need to happen from and within the dangerous recollection of a tradition which is already centuries old. This tradition prefigures permanent perspectives which are always worth thinking about - without it all experiments seem doomed to religious failure.)

Although there are countless examples of this characteristic from our rich family archives, I want to point to just one event in the first redactions of our Dominican Constitutions. The striking "democratic structure" of our Order has been said by experts in administration to be unique among Catholic monastic institutions. This feature can be understood precisely as a result of the typical cross-grained spirituality of the Order (along with its respect for all that is good in the tradition). The Constitutions were "reformulated" during a revision at a time when great canon lawyers from the universities of the *Lime* had entered the Order (for example, Raymond of Penafort). This reformulation took place at a General Chapter in Bologna. Shortly before and during this Chapter, social Protest was voiced in the university and city of Bologna, and in addition there was already a dispute between the Ghibellines (the conservatives) and the Guelphs (the progressive popular party).

Dominicans were involved throughout this conflict as advisors. The "co responsibility of all" required by the progressive party had its influence on our Dominican Constitutions. "What affects all must also be resolved on by all." This new civic principle called for at that time was also supported by the Dominicans and later sanctioned in our Dominican Constitutions (under the influence and as a result of the civic experiences in Bologna). New "secular experiences" thus came to exercise a substantial influence on our earliest Constitutions. The emancipatory social movements of that time left a substantial mark on our Constitutions, differing completely from the traditional administrative model then current. Following the example of Dominic, these Dominicans did not just raise a warning finger and point to what had been the custom from earliest times, but at the same time listened to the voice of God in what came out of the human secular emancipatory movements of the time (however turbulently). As a result of these experiences they rewrote the Dominican monastic structure, barely twenty years after Dominic. That is just one case of the cross thread that the Dominican family story keeps showing as its "own theme" down the ages.

I have recalled only a few Dominican characteristics: more could be mentioned. Furthermore, I should point out explicitly that I am in no way denying that perhaps non Dominicans do the same things. In that case Dominican spirituality can simply say with delight: all the better! It is not our concern to maintain an unparalleled exclusiveness. It is a question of what we, as Dominicans, do here in any case, and do in the strength of the charisma of the Order and our Dominican commitment (through our profession). If others also do the same thing, this can simply confirm the validity, the correct intuition of our view. When a typical view is universalised, it in no way loses its value: quite the opposite.

The man who was once an Augustinian canon, Domingo de Guzman, while trusting in the original direction of his life, nevertheless gave it a new course (which became the beginning of the Dominican Order), thanks to a living contact with needs of people and of the church of which he was unaware when he was first called. One cannot accuse Dominic of betraying his first calling, which was meant to be irrevocable. His change of course was a new way of life (in contact with what then appeared to him to be better possibilities), in order to remain faithful to the deepest sense of his calling, when confronted with new needs. (According to, Dominic's earliest biographers he could be moved to

tears at the sight of the needs of others. Hence the desire of this realistic organizer - which remained with him all his life to go to the Cumani, somewhere in the Balkans, evidently the place where the dualistic heresy crossed from East to West.) The Order came into being from such an amazing change of course in trust. A change of course in trust is therefore part of the essence of the Dominican charisma.

No theologian, canon lawyer, professional psychologist or sociologist can work out at his study desk or in his armchair what we must do now. This must be tried by way of concrete experiment, by charismatically inspired religious, albeit bearing in mind the sometimes dangerously cross-grained element - the golden thread - in our Dominican family story. In so doing it will adopt, with due criticism, the successful attempts in the context of our part, gratefully rethinking them and making them fruitful in the context of the new programme. With Thomas Aquinas, who clearly followed the matter-of-fact and brilliant temperament of Dominic here, we can say, "The excellence of a religious institution does not lie so much in the strictness of its observances as in the fact that these observances are designed with greater skill towards the purpose of the religious life." And in the circumstances of our time this calls for a renewed and skilled religious decision in which all have a share, both high and low, so that the structures themselves remain open to this new cross thread.

This question is our duty. For in our profession we also opt for a particular community, a Dominican community and its ideals. There can be such faults and defects in a particular community (whether through betrayal of the Dominican family story or because this story is no longer alive there and has become fossilized and dead) that out of faithfulness to his or her Dominican ideal the professed religious is ethically permitted (and in some cases may even be obliged) to leave the Dominican community because it does not give him or her the support to which they have a right by virtue of their profession. For paradoxically, here we expose ourselves to the danger that as Dominicans we may expel a "Dominican charisma" from our ranks.

The Dominican family story gives us adequate pointers if we also listen to God's voice in the characteristics of contemporary movements and trace their lines of force, so as to enrich this story with a new chapter which is still to be published. Many people think that the Dominican family story is exhausted, because hardly anyone still comes under its spell. Those of us who are Dominicans today, men and women, are the only ones who can give it a new twist so, that the story flourishes again (not as a stunt or a sensation but as an authentic Dominican family story), so that others in turn will join the Dominican story telling community and continue to hand the story on. Here we may also happily pals on the folklore which each order has alongside its own great story: that simply points to the fact that the great Dominican family story is made up of, and told by, ordinary, very human, people, though they transcend themselves through the strength of God's unmerited and loving grace. However, it would be fatal for the Dominican family story if this greater story eventually became narrower and was reduced to the story of the folklore of Dominican houses.

I am aware that I have said a great deal and very hale. That is perhaps the most appropriate thing for the chapter which we are all adding, here and now, to the story of a great family tradition. I hope that it will become a serial which lasts longer than the stories which have entranced the whole world on television, but which have not in any way renewed the face of the earth: Neighbours, Coronation Street or the Forsyte Saga. May the Dominican story be a parable which in an unspoken, but compelling, way ends with the words of Jesus: "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10.37).

In 1206, even before Dominic was thinking of a Dominican Order, he had founded a convent at Prouille. However, the aim of this convent was on the same lines: Dominic wanted to make the evangelical religious movement, which many women had also joined, into a church movement - that is, to bring the gospel to the church and to bring the church to sectarian gospel movements. Evangelism without the church or the church without evangelism is essentially un-Dominican, that is, it goes against the original charisma which brought the Order into being.

In Dominic's time, gospel inspiration was almost always to be found in "deviant" movements. Hence Dominic's own preaching among the "heretics". From among such women (Waldensians who remained orthodox, the "Catholic Poor") Dominic recruited the first occupants of Prouille: he gave a church atmosphere to the gospel they had experienced outside the church. In 1219 he also founded convents in Madrid and Rome (S. Sisto), to which he gave Constitutions (which would later also form the basis of the Dominican Order). After many difficulties the convent of S. Agnese was founded at Bologna with the financial support of an 18 year old girl, Diana of Andalo (later the friend of the second General, Jordan of Saxony), but only after Dominic's death.

However, it is typical that at the end of his life Dominic, and after his death the whole rule of the Order, systematically began to oppose the incorporation of new convents into the Order. This opposition would involve them in fights with popes until 1259. It is evident from the archives that this opposition was motivated by the aim of the Order itself the tare of the sinners hindered the Dominicans in their task of preaching elsewhere. At a special Chapter in 1228 (in Paris) all Dominicans were prohibited from involvement in spiritual direction and pastoral care in our convents (with the exception of the first four great convents), on pain of expulsion from the Order. In northern areas, however, the growing Dominican movement had encountered the very lively evangelical women's movement there: all of a sudden this became Dominican (or sometimes Franciscan).

After a time there were hundreds of convents, each with more than a hundred evangelical Dominican women. No one had planned this: it was a spontaneous consequence of the encounter between Dominican preaching and the evangelical women's movement of the time. After that, the male Dominicans came to be fundamentally opposed to having to care for the sisters, which hindered the purpose of their own Order. Time and again, papal bulls enjoined the Order against its will to provide both financial and spiritual care for these sisters. In 1252, at the Chapter of Bologna, the Order opposed the repeated papal bulls (occasioned by an appeal from our sisters to Rome).

In a bull of 15 July 1252, Innocent IV made some concessions: Rome would stop issuing the bulls for the moment but the existing convents had to be taken into the care of the Dominicans. However, the Dominicans would not accept this, and in the end they secured a retraction from the same pope, who said: "I have allowed myself to be convinced that preaching is the most essential task of the Order. This aim must have priority and is hindered by the care of the women's convents. Therefore the pope resolves to release the Order from all obligations towards the convents ... with the exceptions of Prouille and San Sisto in Rome."

However, all the convents stormed the papal Curia with heartfelt pleas. The pope was caught between two Dominican fronts: the men and the women. He knew that the men were opposed in principle. Then the Master General, Johannes Teutonicus, died (in 1252). Cardinal Hugo a Santo Caro, who had become a Dominican and was himself enthusiastic about the evangelical women's movement, was given full authority by the pope to come to an arrangement with the Order.

First he wanted to break the opposition of the men "with quiet measures": until the election of the new General (Humbert of Romans), the Dominicans had at least to take over the spiritual care of the sisters. The Order remained obstinate and at the Chapter of Milan in 1255 it was resolved that (in contrast to the monasteries) three successive General Chapters would be needed to come to a decision as to whether a convent was to come under Dominican direction. This first resolution was endorsed in Paris (1256) and Florence (1257) and thus became a Dominican ruling.

In 1259 a definitive resolution was passed that all convents already established had the right to the pastoral care of Dominican priests. (This ending of resistance by the Order was the result of the mediation of the Dominican cardinal Hugo a Santo Caro, who combined both the official Dominican standpoint and that of the church in his own person. In the Order, from Dominic onwards, the specific Dominican character was often a compromise between the papal perspective and the views of the Dominicans; both parties knew how to secure the essentials of their position.) After about 30 years of opposition the Order capitulated: for new convents, the Dominican resolution, passed by three Chapters, remained in force. The combination of papal Curia and Dominican sisters had won the argument.

Furthermore, the Order was obliged to make Constitutions for the whole of the women's side. In the General Chapter of 1259 at Valenciennes, Humbert of Romans approved the Dominican Constitutions as adapted for sisters. All this also gave the sisters economic security, so that they could devote themselves to a life of study and contemplation (since left to themselves, the sisters often lived in very real poverty as a result of over population). The close collaboration of male and female Dominicans that now took place resulted in the Dominican mystical movement which rose in the fourteenth century. This followed from the theological and mystical direction of women by Dominican lectors and the women's response to the direction (1300-1480). This was in the time of the Great Plague, which also affected thousands of Dominicans and had broken their initial verve. Furthermore, the Order was divided by the schism: Avignon and the two popes.

Later, above all in the nineteenth century, many congregations of sisters were founded outside the Order, so that the Order did not have any responsibility for them and no one was concerned for a truly Dominican spirituality: this spirit was often that of normal nineteenth century religious life with its inspiration towards works of charity.

As Dominicans, therefore, we need to remember that in our day many developments have taken place in which men and women together are seeking a form of Dominican spirituality in a modern revival of life in accordance with the gospel, combined with social criticism. Although it is still a search, we may not simply rule out this Dominican possibility. A Dominican community spirit and the collaboration of Dominican brothers and sisters may perhaps help us to understand the mystical Dominican movement in the fourteenth century (a high point of Dominican spirituality). Taught by our own history, we may not dismiss possible new charismata out of hand. "Dominican options" which are new and at first sight disconcerting are possibilities for the future and may not be suppressed per se, though we must pay attention to the danger of references to the religious past.

(Source : Schillebeeckx, Edward. *Dominican Spirituality*. Taken from Borgman, Erik. *Edward Schillebeeckx. A Theologian in His History*. Continuum, 2002.)