How can something called tradition be considered new? Centuries before the Christian era, the prophet Isaiah said this to a people weary from exile: "I am doing a new thing." (Is 43.) How can a mission that has been around for 800 years (based on the gospel mission that is even older!) be considered new? How can these words of the biblical prophet be understood by today’s leaders who are charged with continuing the Dominican tradition and mission?

The same, and new. Similar, yet different. Making sense of these contrasts is one of the tasks in honoring history. If newness is to be trusted, it is necessary for mission leaders to exhibit an openness to innovation. Every aspect of organizational life can exude the vision of a fresh approach. A new generation will provide energy for the present and confidence for the future of the organization, when mentored by those who are hopeful and can be graceful about letting go. This attitude enables them to see the ways that others are being faithful to tradition and true to mission, without holding on to a narrow or rigid interpretation of the past.

Spirograph Nebula
Catherine of Siena, *Dialog*, 119
Pursuing answers to questions and determining whether there is still Good News to share with those who hunger for it has never been more urgently needed—or more possible! All those who have a stake in the mission, whether leaders or followers, are colleagues rooted in a foundational tradition. Trusting the expertise of mentors and co-workers is essential and can be strengthened by the experience of a shared spiritual formation.

Shaping a Dominican mission that is true to its tradition depends upon having a mature and educated faith. This is obviously an era when the founding members of the Order are relying on leadership from others. Often hiring for mission is limited to the articulated expectation that leaders are “practicing Catholics.” An ongoing need for any mission to remain vital is a commitment to make it possible for all participants to deepen in their faith, and to have experiences of this together.

Previously a Dominican formation, learned during years of daily spiritual practice in community life, provided the stable background for sustaining commitment to a common mission. Today it is essential to offer shared opportunities for spiritual formation with the present partners in mission. Goals of this shared experience include the following: developing the skills for shaping a vision based on the demands of the Gospel and linking this vision to the signs of the times; having opportunities to develop a more tolerant acceptance of their own experience and a genuine respect for the experience of others, which may be very different from their own; deepening a capacity for ethical thinking regarding consequences, rights, justice, and virtue. Leaders who are responsible for this adult faith formation must be attentive to identifying needs and matching them with reliable resources that will provide intellectual stimulation. It is also important to provide suitable places for colleagues to gather in reflection and study, conversation and prayer.

The outcomes can be quite unpredictable. Will it enliven the mission story? Colleagues will express themselves using language very different from what had previously been considered standard. They may withhold their consent to the authority of the past, identify different concerns that they believe are in need of attention, or admit to struggles that diminish their enthusiasm for mission. Even when shared formation experiences are based on sound principles related to Scripture, church teaching, and social justice, they will be experienced differently depending upon the developmental stage of participants. Responses will vary from the promises of a packaged program to produce a common vision.

Spiritual formation is as important and necessary as any other kind of professional development. It can provide a unique setting where colleagues who have diverse responsibilities can experience together a way of having their eyes and hearts opened, horizons widened, conviction deepened, and faith strengthened. It is a form of preaching the Gospel that provides an experience of shared grace, as all are invited to enter more fully into the mystery of God’s love and into the mystery that they have an urgent role to play in sharing that love with others.

The Preaching Mission Continues

“What is required of us at this crucial moment in the Church’s history is this: resolutely to pursue answers to the questions that arise as we hear the call of St. Dominic. Is it still Christ who is witness in us? Is it he who gives meaning to our words? If his face is being blurred by our preaching (which would be making room only for the best of merely human hopes), then we have a question to answer. Do we still have Good News to reveal to the human being who hunger, perhaps without knowing it, for the life God promises? . . . The Order must always be the same and yet always new.” Aniceto Fernández, OP (Birth of St. Dominic: 800 Years On To Praise, To Bless, To Preach: Words of Grace and Truth, Dominican Publications, 2004).

“Our Order, it has been said since its origins, was founded for preaching. The dialogue with unbelief and lay culture is today one of the great urgencies of our time, but how can we dialogue without knowing the ideologies that make up the mentality and the culture of the contemporary world? How can we dialogue with the culture and at the same time respect its autonomy? How can we make it possible that our preaching, or human word, may be the saving word of God?” Maria Immaculada Egüés, OP ([Spain] Building Bridges: Dominicans Doing Theology Together, Dominican Publications, 2005).
"Any tradition based on an authentic experience of God’s presence within a community over a sufficient period of time can be definitive, privileged, and authoritative for the community that shares that experience. Thus something analogous to the ‘word of God’ is found in that tradition, but that word is not necessarily unchanging, universal, one and only, or infallible because it is articulated only in human words that are limited. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, ‘Since our knowledge of God is limited, our language about [God] is equally so. We can name God only by taking creatures as our starting point, and in accordance with our limited human ways of knowing and thinking.’ (#40) Cletus Wessels, OP (Jesus in the New Universe Story, Orbis, 2003).

"The mission of Dominic is a mission of compassion. This Jubilee of the Order coincides with another important anniversary: forty years from the publication of the document Populorum Progressio (March 26, 1967). In the drafting of this encyclical our brother Louis Joseph Lebret (1897–1966) collaborated in a fundamental manner." Re-read this text, wherein are the traces of a profound spirituality of compassion. (International Dominican Commission for Justice and Peace, January 30, 2007.)

"Development of the individual necessarily entails a joint effort for the development of the human race as a whole. . . . as brothers and sisters, as children of God. . . . we must meet in mutual understanding and friendship, in sacred communion, and begin to work together to build the common future of the human race. . . . and explore concrete and practicable ways of organizing and coordinating efforts, so that available resources might be shared with others; in this way genuine bonds between nations might be forged." (Populorum Progressio, 43.)

ON AUGUST 2 THE ORDER HONORS THE MEMORY OF JANE OF AZA, MOTHER OF ST. DOMINIC, WHO REPRESENTS THE IMPORTANCE OF A LOVING AND SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP. THE LEGEND OF A DREAM IMAGE ATTRIBUTED TO JANE, WHICH HAS A DOG BEARING A TORCH IN ITS MOUTH, BECAME A SYMBOL OF THE LIFE OF DOMINIC THE PREACHER, WHO ILLUMINATED THE WORLD WITH THE FIRE OF GOD’S TRUTH AND LOVE.

FOR REFLECTION

What is necessary to be faithful to the tradition while also being true to the mission?

How can leaders be an effective presence in the culture?
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