**THE LAY DOMINICAN APOSTOLATE FOR THE FUTURE**

*Good morning, I’m Steve Male from the Edinburgh Fraternity. It’s a pleasure to be here today. The* *Lay Dominican Apostolate* is a challenging topic, and I’m looking forward to the rest of our day together to hear other viewpoints and perspectives on it.

My brief talk is a personal reflection; not as President of the Edinburgh Fraternity, although I have drawn on that experience. My talk has also been shaped first, by the fact that Covid has dominated my period of office; a poster presentation is at the Assembly. Second, the Edinburgh Fraternity is studying Vatican II as part of our Fraternity response to the Pope Francis's Synodality process. This has included the Decree - *Apostolate of the Laity* - from which I draw parts of my talk.

I have been grappling for some time with trying to answer the question on the Purpose and Mission of the Lay Dominicans within the Dominican Order, which also brings into sharp focus our distinctive Apostolate.

Perhaps part of the answer might be how we now respond to the ‘Signs of the Times’. The Church and societies globally have been impacted severely by Covid; there is a devastating war in Europe, the consequences of Climate Change are ever more imminent; as witnessed with the recent floods in Pakistan and famine in Somalia, the wildfires in the UK; and not forgetting the ever-melting ice caps. Climate Change has the potential to impact deeply the very fabric of our societies, and our continued existence on this planet, along with other species.

When set against this background, the Vatican II Decree, the *Apostolate of the Laity,* throws down the gauntlet in terms of our Lay Dominican distinctiveness and our Apostolate. Clause 3 of the Decree says very powerfully, "The laity derive *the right and the duty* to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. Clause 3 also adds, “On all Christians is laid the preeminent responsibility of working to make *the Divine message of salvation known and accepted* by all throughout the world. Clause 2 says: Christ conferred on the Apostles and their successors, the duty of teaching, sanctifying, and ruling in His name and power. *The laity likewise share in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ and therefore have their own share in the mission of the whole People of God in the Church and in the world.* Clause 5 and Clause 7 hammer this home even further. Clause 5 says: the Christian laity exercise their apostolate *in both the spiritual and the temporal orders.* Clause 7 adds: The laity must take up *the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation, acting directly and in a definite way in the temporal sphere. Vatican 2 sets the bar high and mandates an Apostolate of the Laity; but what does this mean for the distinctive Apostolate of the Lay Dominicans.*

*The Order of Preachers has a very clear Mission, it’s all in the name*. Also, St Dominic called lay people to help him when the Order was being set up. The Order has very prominent Lay Dominican Saints in its 800-year history. This legacy follows us into the present. In Edinburgh Fraternity presentations I have often found it difficult to encapsulate in *a clear succinct statement* what ‘our Lay Dominican essence’ is when speaking to others. It is perhaps easier to talk about our Dominican history or the four pillars of Dominican Spirituality.

I’ll now unpick this conundrum a little further. A few years ago, the Edinburgh Fraternity started an outreach programme to parishes represented in our Fraternity. For my part, I touched on the fact there are two parts to our title, that of Lay and that of Dominican. It seemed to me those two words formed opposite ends of a spectrum, or a Seesaw, with a fulcrum in the centre as a balance point. The Seesaw is in perfect balance when there is an equal and steady pressure at both ends. I would argue it is at that fulcrum where we get our strength, our uniqueness, and our distinctiveness, and where the ‘Lay Dominican essence’ lies, with our eyes on both ends of the Seesaw at the same time. Perhaps St Dominic, when he founded the Order, recognized this when lay people joined him to assist with The Order’s then embryonic Mission in the Languedoc.

We, as Lay Dominicans, are embedded in both the temporal order of the world and the spiritual order as represented through The Dominican Order itself, its role within the Church and wider society. The two opposite ends again of our Seesaw; but this time encompassing the Temporal and the Spiritual.

I’ll extend the analogy of the Seesaw further to one of a Bridge, which also links two ends of something by a pathway or carriageway. At the very centre of the bridge, its fulcrum, we also have the potential to look in both directions at the same time. Through the various stages of Lay Dominican Profession, we secure a better understanding of the other end of the bridge: the Mission of the Order, of Preaching for the salvation of souls, The Order’s history, and what it means to be a Dominican. I will return to thoughts on Preaching shortly.

A few miles from Edinburgh, the new Queensferry Crossing is an iconic bridge. It links the Edinburgh side of the River Forth to the old Kingdom of Fife and beyond. It is a very impressive cable stay bridge and its carriageway has a strong upward curvature to provide strength. Its strength also comes from a series of pillars below and long cable stays above. Speaking allegorically, the four pillars of Dominican Spirituality could be seen as providing the underpinning foundation to the bridge and its carriageway, linking the Temporal and Spiritual ends of our metaphorical curved bridge; the Lay and the Dominican ends together. Those four pillars provide the deep spiritual support to the upper parts of the bridge. That was the challenge the Edinburgh Fraternity faced during the Covid pandemic, how to keep these four pillars functioning as a Fraternity.

Since our allegorical bridge also spans the Temporal and the Spiritual, I would suggest the cable stays *could be interpreted as the strengthening strands of Governance*. Importantly, *Governance* helps to shape how we make decisions, function, operate, and also how we steer our way collectively towards our Mission and Apostolate. The pillars and the cable stays are vital to the stability and endurance of the bridge, just as the carriageway functions to get from one side to the other; from the Lay to the Dominican; from the Temporal to the Spiritual.

It is God who holds this whole, complex, mutually reinforcing, allegorical structure in dynamic tension, in much the same way as He does our universe and our own planet within it.

I said earlier I would return to the Pillar of Preaching, the mainstay of the Order. Since I first joined the Lay Dominicans, that topic has proven difficult to get my head around. For the Friars it is why the Order exists. Within a Lay Dominican context, I have reinterpreted Preaching as an Encounter with other people, engaging with them through a spiritual conversation, a discussion, a dialogue, or a discourse, and importantly in friendship. This *interpretation* comes from reflecting on the two Friars who were instrumental in bringing me into the Catholic Church long before I became a Lay Dominican - *Fr Anthony Ross and Fr Marcus Lefebure*. They did exactly this, they engaged in a spiritual conversion and discussion with me; quietly, gently and with friendship, and never once trying to convert me. They are the reason I eventually became a Catholic and then a Lay Dominican.

To conclude, I hope I have not stretched analogy and allegorical interpretations too far. What I am clear about, however, is that we as Lay Dominicans can function as that bridge between the Temporal and the Spiritual, between the Laity in general, the Church, and the Religious within the Order. That is our strength, our uniqueness, and our distinctiveness. Functioning as a bridge from the Temporal to the Spiritual is our ‘essence’, and our Purpose in The Order and the Dominican Family.