



OPFAM

Dominican Family Matters

A Newsletter for the Dominican Family in Australia, New Zealand, Solomons and Papua New Guinea

Woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel!

Motto for the years leading up to 800th celebration in 2016;

21st June 2011

**“We hear them speaking in our own tongues of the marvellous acts of God” (Acts 2:11):
Preaching and Culture / Community Preaching**

Dominican Thought For the Week

**“If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world on fire.
Let the Truth be your delight... proclaim it... but with a certain congeniality.”
St Catherine of Siena**

Breaking Slavery in Brazil

Brother Xavier Plassat has been working to put an end to slavery in northern Brazil for more than 30 years. Freeing slaves is only part of the solution, he tells us. The only way to truly eradicate slavery is to provide laborers with alternatives, which is no easy task.

A Dominican friar, Brother Plassat coordinates the work of the Pastoral Land Commission, an organization of the Catholic bishops of Brazil formed to eradicate slavery in Brazil. With the support of Catholic Relief Services, the Pastoral Land Commission defends and promotes the rights of poor landless families and those who have escaped slavery.

Brother Plassat spoke to CRS' Alsy Acevedo about the cycle of slavery in Brazil and how he's working to break it.

How does the Pastoral Land Commission work to stop slavery?

The Pastoral Land Commission was founded in 1975 to help rural families in the northeastern part of the country. Our expertise is in land reform. We knew rural families were expelled from the land where they lived and were the subject of threats and retaliation. But then we started receiving complaints from laborers running away from slavery.

That was 35 years ago, and it opened our eyes. We didn't know the reality of the situation at first. The next step was to advocate inside Brazil and outside the country, in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, to get their attention on the slavery issue.

Are you making progress? Is the situation getting better?

At first, we were calling attention to this issue without much success. In the '80s and '90s, we were exposing slavery cases but also collecting very detailed information on these cases. That made it possible for us to approach Brazil's government with concrete numbers and ask for explanations. In 1995, Brazil acknowledged the reality of slavery. In 1997, we launched a campaign to educate people on how to avoid becoming a slave: Open Your Eyes: Don't Become a Slave.

Progress has been made in tracking the issue, investigating reported abuses and rescuing workers. Now there are stricter laws and industry agreements addressing slave labor, although we're still working on the implementation of those policies.

Once slaves are freed, then what?

Between 25,000 and 40,000 people in Brazil are held in slavery, where they are threatened, abused and degraded. On average, about 4,500 slaves are freed in Brazil each year. But freeing slaves is not sufficient. It does little to eradicate slavery. What I'm saying is that freeing slaves is just an emergency response, but it doesn't eradicate the roots of the problem. That's why we are working on a comprehensive approach to break the cycle.

The cycle starts with vulnerability, because people are landless and jobless. They are enticed to leave their region to work, and once they are far away from home they are forced to labor as slaves. Finally, they decide to escape or are rescued. But if they return to poverty and unemployment, the cycle can start again. We are pushing for investigation of the cases, punishment for the people responsible for this degrading treatment, decent jobs for former slaves and consolidation of these efforts through comprehensive laws and public policy.

The true way out of slavery is strong land reform that gives people who are landless the opportunity to stay in the regions where they are from and have access to work that provides them a livelihood. For example, there was a group of 40 people who were rescued from slavery and returned to their original region. There, we helped them get organized and negotiate with the local government so they could lease land. Now they have a co-op and are working the land together in a dignified manner that allows them to provide for their families.

Is that example part of the Social Mobilization Against Slave Labor in Brazil project?

Yes, it is just part of the project. CPT has a presence and representatives spread across 26 states of Brazil. It serves as a refuge for former slaves who escaped or who were rescued and who seek justice. We initiate the claims and take action on their cases. We also carry out prevention and outreach activities. Thanks to the support of Catholic Relief Services, we are multiplying our efforts.

The project focuses on three areas. The first is taking in former slaves, providing legal assistance, getting the victims medical treatment and enrolling them in school. Second, we are expanding the social mobilization and outreach efforts against slave labor, coordinating events and producing materials to raise awareness on slavery. Third, our ultimate goal is to influence the creation of new antislavery laws and public policies and create alternatives to slavery. We hope this 3-year plan will strengthen our national network and our ties in the communities, especially in remote areas where workers are more vulnerable.

What can people do to help abolish slavery?

Apart from contributing and supporting organizations that are working on this issue, people should be more aware of slavery and how it relates to their daily lives. We have to be more vigilant because, in some ways, we are all involved through the products we purchase and the politicians we support who are avoiding the issue.

As consumers—as citizens—we are part of the solution. What we decide to buy, who we decide to vote for, makes a difference. www.op.org

The Death of Magister Aycardus

Announcing the publication of *The Death of Magister Aycardus* an inspiring historical fictional novel by **Michael Thomas-Paul Demkovich, OP** from the Province of St. Albert the Great, U.S.A. Watch the book trailer at www.youtube.com/user/DZRTWLO.

Additional materials:

Book trailer: <http://www.youtube.com/dzrtwlo>

Reading by author: <http://www.youtube.com/dzrtwlo#p/u/6/VrYbGmeMLWE>

[Amazon review](#)

Ecumenical Religious Community,

Interview with Rosemary Castañeda Montoya, OP:

"I am now at the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey, attending a study of Ecumenical Spirituality with young people from different churches. I belong to the Community of Sisters of Charity Dominicans of Presentation. I am a Theologian, from the Gregoriana Pontifical University.

I attended Bible and Mission studies at the Biblical School of the Gregoriana. I also attended Bible studies at the DEI. (Costa Rica). I have always been a University Educator. 19 years as a Biblical Theology Professor at the Consiliar Seminar of Medellin and at the Bolivariana Pontifical University of Medellin. I also worked as a Theology Professor at the San Jose Major Seminar in Panama City and at the same time professor at the University of Santa Maria (with the Dominicans)."

What led you to participate to the ecumenical religious community of Bossey?

The Congregation received a call from the Vatican, through a Dominican Priest, Father Vladimiro Caroli, OP (he works in the Christian Unity Office at the Vatican), to participate to the ecumenical experience in Bossey. The General Superior Monique Colrad offered me the opportunity of participating and I feel fortunate to be in this excellent space where you can grow in ecumenical spirituality, you learn to value and love the many cultures that come to Bossey, you meet great young leaders from the different parts of the world where they are living their lives in the name of the Gospel,

you understand with great openness the universality of churches, as we increasingly love our Catholic Church and value all that it represents.

Can you briefly explain what this community is and how it functions?

The WCC, the Ecumenical Council of the Churches, is “a fraternal community of Churches who believe in Jesus Christ Our Lord as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and make efforts to collectively respond to their vocation for the Glory of the only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (Constitution). It is made up of 349 churches that search for unity, a common testimony and service.

To follow Jesus Christ is a central point in our condition of ecumenical family. All the programs serve this vocation. The consultations about world mission and evangelization have evidenced that following Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour in a plural world requires unity in the mission. The objective of all processes is to give testimony of the love of God for the entire humanity manifested in Jesus Christ.

If the divided Churches must reach the visible unity they wish for, one of the essential prerequisites shall be to basically agree with what relates to baptism, Eucharist and ministry. It is therefore logical that the Commission of faith and Constitution has dedicated a maximum attention to overcoming the doctrinal divisions in these three topics.

...The Ecumenical Institute of Bossey belongs to the World Council of Churches. It is a Study Centre, of ecumenical community experience, of reflection and research to reach concrete paths of unity and achieve Jesus' Project: “May all be one”. Young people from different parts of the world and churches belonging to the WCC come here. Here, they are formed as future leaders of their churches and at the same time I see HOPE in them since you hear and see in them a desire for UNITY rather than continued divisions that represent a scandal for those who search for the Gospel.

There is something very beautiful that is worth noting: the experience of several religious women from different churches, Orthodox, Anglicans, Protestants and Catholics who experience life in an ecumenical community and at the same time, we give a testimony to the young that it is the Spirit who makes UNITY and brings us together as live Stones in order to live the Gospel as our single passion.

The theme of the 2011 Dominican Jubilee is: Preaching and Culture / Community Preaching. From the standpoint of a Dominican Sister, what does this theme suggest to you based on your experience in Switzerland?

The highest “moment of Grace” I had was to understand that the best preaching is the one done in the inside, through a fraternal sharing, in the ecumenical liturgy, through the exchange of FAITH we constantly carry out in the Ecumenical Theology. I feel I have celebrated this jubilee year enjoying the FAITH DEBATES when several churches meet to talk and attempt to understand where the truth of said Doctrine lies. I have understood what Saint Thomas repeatedly says about Studies and how to carry out a theological discussion not only to favour learning, but also to reinforce the Faith in Christ.

What do you mostly like about this experience?

To extend it, make it eternal, to experience that all I have lived does not end with me. BOSSEY offers us many spaces and opportunities. Every day I am surprised with yet another experience of Universality. I have experienced how the Spirit works, making the Project of Unity. The experience in Taizé, an ecumenical place of prayer, responded to many queries that emerged from me. I was sent to Bern (Switzerland), to a Reform parish, I enjoyed the learning I acquired there; the simplicity of the Reform Pastors and the parish Council taught me that they were not closed to other churches. There I realized that they work together for the Gospel, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, etc, and Catholics. They asked me to preach the Magnificat to them from Latin America and my joy was overwhelming when I shared my Dominican spirit of announcing the Gospel with them.

What are the most difficult challenges for you?

To achieve in me a truly ecumenical spirit. To understand Jesus' desire: May they all be ONE and make it a reality wherever I am. To experience that each church different from ours is in search, just like the Samaritan, of the “water of Life”. However, the strongest challenge for me is to perceive the breath of the Spirit that indicates to us how we may achieve unity based on the ecumenical spirituality, which not only consists of praying together, but also loving the other through his mistakes, not leaving him in them, but offering him the Divine experience I have already found.

In religious life, a lot is said about creating intercongregational communities, including in the Dominican World. What do you think about this?

I had dreamed about it many years back. Now that I have had this ecumenical experience I believe it is possible. Here, we are taught to live in community, respecting each charism, each way of being a church different from my own.

Especially for us, who have one same charism, even if read and lived from another perspective. It does not mean that some must lose their own to take in another new way. It means to share the experiences of the Spirit in such an ample charism, as contemplation, the search for truth and the Announcement of the Gospel, in an Interdominican community.

Would you suggest to other congregations to live an experience like the one found at Bossey?

It is my desire, an imploration I do to the church, a petition I make to the God of Jesus Christ... I wish we could all go through that experience. We all need it, especially in this 21st Century where the young are growing up in a pluralist environment, with no formation in FAITH which is what makes unity.

I have read as many books by Yves Congar, OP as I have been able to find. I learned to love him here in BOSSEY, because as a Dominican, he is a great forerunner of ecumenism in the Catholic Church. And like him and other Dominicans, I feel that our charism can contribute a lot to the unity among churches. *DS!*

Dominican Calendar

Jun-23 Bl. Innocent V (1224-1276) AKA "Peter of Tarentaise", French, pope (1276, first Dominican pope), scholar, administrator, Archbishop of Lyons.

Please send contributions – short paragraphs – about Dominican Life in your area to archives5@bigpond.com.au – OFTEN!