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Call for Papers

Building Bridges and Paving the Way: Dominicans at the Frontiers of Catholic Christianity.

4th Isnard-Wilhelm-Frank Conference, Vienna (Austria) 17-19 October 2019

The origin of the Dominican preaching apostolate is usually related to the fight against heretics in Languedoc. Looking at the deeper, spiritual motivation of Saint Dominic, his religious desire and longing for the salvation of all people must also be taken into consideration, however. From the very beginning of the Order, this universal impulse in the spirituality of the founder led friars to go to the frontiers of the Christian world, there to live the Gospel and preach it without violence. The first successors of St. Dominic promoted these missionary initiatives. Thus, the foundation of Dominican convents in the Middle East and along the Silk Road date back to the 13th century. In the early modern period, Dominicans accompanied the Spanish and Portuguese explorers and conquerors to America and East Asia, becoming early advocates of human rights. After the Reformation, the Order did not fail to engage itself in the efforts of re-Catholization and Catholic reform. Up to the present, the Order has stood by its commitment to mission, facing new challenges in recent decades and developing new forms of mission as a result.

Against this background, the objective of the symposium is to examine the work of the Dominicans at the “frontiers” of Catholic Christianity and to look at their missionary commitment as “bridge builders”. Bridge builders do not put up fences or walls, but seek connections, possibilities of communication and common bases for discussion, in order to enable encounter and dialogue and thereby ensure the necessary conditions for mission and reconciliation. These “frontiers” of the Church and Christianity may be found not only in the geographical mission areas of the Old World; they run across all societies. Talk of social “margins”, religious “ghettos”, social fractures and cultural boundaries, not only in the contemporary but also in the medieval and modern world, betrays the existence of “frontiers”.

At the same time, frontiers, like fences and walls, are ambivalent. They can exclude or they can protect. They may be built for defense or they may be waiting to be surmounted. Frontiers are perceived as natural or unnatural, marking identity or branding; they are the space between the familiar and the foreign. The concept of the "bridge builder," therefore, has an ambivalence, which one may connote either positively or negatively. It has been brought into disrepute at least since the attempts of so-called open-minded theologians, who tried to identify “connecting points” between Christianity and National Socialist ideology. Being a bridge builder thus requires courage, but wisdom as well. The imperative of openness must pay heed to the indicative of truth. Furthermore, one has to ask whether the Dominican "bridge builders" understood themselves more as door openers or as border guards—though these two might be

closely related. Did they help overcome frontiers or, on the contrary, did they help solidify them? Did they think only of the people *on* the frontiers, or did they reach out to those who were *beyond*?

Against this background, the aim of the symposium is to examine Dominican influence in various areas of mission and evangelization and to explore the question of how Friars Preachers interpreted the challenge of going to the frontiers of Catholic Christianity. As already said, when we speak about frontiers, it is not just the geographic or spatial mission of earlier centuries that is intended. Dividing lines between denominations and religions, as well as between different worlds of imagination, ideologies, ways of life, and milieus are meant as well.

On the one hand, the objective of the symposium is to shed light on the historical contribution of the Order of the Preachers to a concrete missionary apostolate and, on the other hand, to highlight the diversity of cultural and religious encounters in the history of the Church. The event thus means to give expression to a missionary self-understanding and demonstrate how a universal vision of salvation can both overcome or fail at the frontiers.

Possible symposium topics are:

- the activities of Dominicans in the 13th century: Cathars in Languedoc, mission to the Jews, Muslims and Gentiles, dialogue and controversy with Eastern Christianity;
- the role of Dominicans in the context of the discovery of the New World since the end of the 15th century;
- the attitude of Dominicans towards the Protestant Reformation and their part in establishing a Catholic identity after the Council of Trent;
- the contribution of the Dominican Order to the missions of the 19th and 20th centuries;
- the perception of strangeness, diversity, and novelty by the Dominicans in philosophy, (controversial) theology and Christian cultural commitments;
- the confrontation with critical and atheist concepts in the Middle Ages and Modern Period, as well as the contribution of the Dominicans in ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and Weltanschauung;
- the work of Dominicans on social frontiers: worker-priests, pastoral care of prisoners, migrants, minorities, and socially marginalized groups;

This symposium is a cooperative project of the Dominican Historical Institute, the Department of Historical Theology of the University of Vienna, and the Dominican convent of Vienna.

Presentation and paper proposals, including an abstract and a CV, can be submitted to Fr. Viliam Stefan Dóci OP until the 1st of March 2019: E-Mail: istitutostorico_presidente@pust.it