



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE MASTER GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS

*To the Very Reverend Timothy Radcliffe
Master General of the Order of Preachers*

"Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col 1:12), I greet you and the Order of Preachers on the occasion of the Elective General Chapter beginning in Rhode Island on 10 July 2001. As you gather for the first Chapter of the new millennium to elect the eighty-fifth successor of your blessed Founder, Saint Dominic, I invoke upon the members of the Chapter the light of the Holy Spirit, so that everything you think and say and do may bring strength to the Order and peace to the Church, and may thus give glory to God.

From the outset, one of the first tasks assigned to your Order was the proclamation of the truth of Christ in response to the Albigensian heresy, a new form of the recurrent Manichaean heresy with which Christianity has had to contend from the beginning. At its core there lay the denial of the Incarnation, a refusal to accept that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). To respond to this new form of the old heresy, the Holy Spirit raised up the Order of Preachers, men who would be pre-eminent for their poverty and mobility in the service of the Gospel, who would unceasingly contemplate the truth of the Incarnate Word in prayer and study, and through their preaching and teaching would pass on to others the fruits of that contemplation. *Contemplata aliis tradere*: the motto of the Order became its great call to action, and it remains such to this day.

In your Chapter, you will reflect upon the intimately related themes "Preaching the Gospel in a globalized world" and "The renewal of the contemplative life". The history of your Order indicates that the Gospel will be preached in fresh and effective ways in a fast-changing world only if Christians follow the path of contemplation which leads to a deeper relationship with Christ, "known through his manifold presence in the Church and in the world, and confessed as the

meaning of history and the light of life's journey" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 15).

It is clear that the ancient afflictions of the human soul and the great untruths never die but lie hidden for a time, to reappear later in other forms. That is why there is always need for a new evangelization of the kind to which the Holy Spirit is now summoning the whole Church. We live in a time marked in its own way by a denial of the Incarnation. For the first time since Christ's birth two thousand years ago, it is as if he no longer had a place in an ever more secularized world. Not that he is always denied explicitly: indeed many claim to admire Jesus and to value elements of his teaching. Yet he remains distant: he is not truly known, loved and obeyed, but consigned to a distant past or a distant heaven.

Ours is an age which denies the Incarnation in a multitude of practical ways, and the consequences of this denial are clear and disturbing. In the first place, the individual's relationship with God is seen as purely personal and private, so that God is removed from the processes that govern social, political and economic activity. This leads in turn to a greatly diminished sense of human possibility, since it is Christ alone who fully reveals the magnificent possibilities of human life, who truly "reveals man to himself" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22). When Christ is excluded or denied, our vision of human purpose dwindles; and as we anticipate and aim for less, hope gives way to despair, joy to depression. There also appears a profound distrust of reason and of the human capacity to grasp the truth; indeed the very concept of truth is cast into doubt. To their mutual impoverishment, faith and reason part company, degenerating into fideism on the one hand and rationalism on the other (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 48). Life is not valued and loved; and hence the advance of a certain culture of death, with its dark blooms of abortion and euthanasia. The body and human sexuality are not properly valued and loved; hence the degradation of sex which shows itself in a tide of moral confusion, infidelity and the violence of pornography. Creation itself is not valued and loved; hence the spectre of destructive selfishness in the misuse and exploitation of the environment.

In such a situation, the Church and the Successor of the Apostle Peter look to the Order of Preachers with no less hope and confidence than at the time of your foundation. The needs of the new evangelization are great; and it is certain that your Order, with its many vocations and outstanding heritage, must play a vital part in the Church's mission to overturn the old untruths and proclaim the message of Christ effectively at the dawn of the new millennium. As he lay dying, Saint Dominic said to his grieving brothers: "Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you beyond my death, and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life". I pray most fervently that the intercession of your Founder will strengthen you for the tasks now at hand, and that the great host of Dominican Saints who have adorned the Order's past will illumine its path into the future. Entrusting the Order of Preachers to the maternal care of Our Lady of the Rosary, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you, to the members of the Chapter and to all the Friars as a pledge of endless grace and peace in Jesus Christ, "the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation" (*Col 1:15*).

From the Vatican, 28 June 2001

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