



ORDER OF PREACHERS



Sounds in the Silence at Museo San Marco, Florence



Invitation to Dominicans to create Sounds in the Silence

In conjunction with the Dominican Jubilee 800 celebrations, Museo San Marco, Florence has kindly agreed to host members of the Dominican Family throughout the Jubilee Year. Dominican friars, nuns, sisters and laity are invited to sing selected Dominican chants in the presence of original artworks of Beato Angelo in various locations of the museum (Cloister of St. Antoninus, Chapter Room, Refectory and upper Corridor).

If you are planning a pilgrimage to Dominican Italy, or a visit to Saint Dominic's tomb in Bologna, then why not consider coming to San Marco in Florence to engage firsthand with Beato Angelico's original artworks, and enhance that experience by creating Sounds in the Silence, with hymns, antiphons, and responsories from the Dominican Liturgical Repertory, many of whose texts Fra Angelico incorporated into his artworks.

If interested in participating in this initiative during the Dominican Jubilee Year, please download and complete the booking form and email to: m.dunleavy1@yahoo.co.uk

For further information contact:

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From the Culture of Dependency to the Culture of Common Belonging

This is essentially what we can learn from the teachings of the Master of the Order, Brother Bruno Cadore during his second visitation to the General Vicariate of St. Pius V in the Democratic Republic of Congo. He made the visit from 14 to 23 July 2015 accompanied by his Socius for Africa, Brother Gabriel Samba.

Several highlights marked this visit: meetings with the formation council, with the commission for intellectual life, with the economic council and with the vicariate council. The Master of the Order visited the communities of Kisangani and Mbuji-Mayi where he could not go during the first visitation in January 2012. By car and motorbike, by boat and on foot, under a blazing sun, the Master of the Order immersed himself in the apostolic realities of the brothers: in the chapels of the military chaplaincy, in the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes, etc.



On Sunday, 19 July, he met the Dominican Family at St Dominic priory, Kinshasa. Diversity and unity: this was the theme developed by Brother Bruno. At 10:30 am, he participated in the priestly ordination Mass of three brothers: Joseph Baraka Bangana, Don de Dieu Katsikuma Wa Kabamba and Frederic Mwindilay Balekelay, in the parish church of St. Dominic of Limete, Kinshasa.

The focal point of the visitation was the assessment of the restructuring process for the transition of the Vicariate General to the status of a Vice-Province. This assessment was based on the analysis of three challenges. The first challenge is the holy preaching, a horizon without which any significant restructuring is a vain enterprise. At the heart of this issue of a preaching that is continually better adapted to the needs of people, the world and the Church, there is also (this is the second challenge) that of the “tradition”, that is to say, the “transmission of the tradition of the Preachers” to the new generations. The third challenge is the urgent imperative to get out from multiple dependencies and instead to stimulate and promote a sense of common belonging to the same entity. For in the Order, it is this common belonging to a province, supported by a full commitment to the common good as much as apostolic activity, which develops us in our own personal Dominican life, and in our own ministry of preaching. To move from the status of a General Vicariate to that of a Vice-Province, it is imperative to be ready to make the transition from a culture of dependency to a culture of common belonging.

Brother Bruno dwelt upon three main areas affected by this process and that constitutes his key points. First of all, the economic realities served in a practice that will be as reliable as possible and on which depends the possibility of allocating external support. The Master of the Order noted that it seems impossible to continue to seek the solidarity of other entities or of the Order, who draw their resources precisely in the pooling of assets for the benefit of an entity that refuses to make this a basic element in the organization of its material life. The second key point in making the transition to a culture of common ownership is the apostolic life. Here brother Bruno insisted on the fact of promoting awareness among all to be engaged in a common apostolic responsibility. For it is through the implementation of an apostolic community project that the brothers will, in each community, address the determining issues for defining a common mission. The third key point is formation. The Master of the Order has recommended regular assessment of the novitiate which is temporarily located at St. Dominic priory in Kinshasa, together with the studentate.

These teachings ended with a note on government, stressing that the primary objective of government in the Order is to promote communion among the brothers and to be a sign. He insisted also on respect for the principle of subsidiarity. The General Vicariate of St. Pius V is moving towards becoming a Vice-Province by 2016.

fr. Gabriel Samba, OP.

[Letter from the Dominican Sisters in Iraq](#)

Letter from Sr Maria Hanna, OP, 22 July 2015

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends,

As we approach the first anniversary of our displacement, we look back and recall the past 12 months. We undertake this recollection to call to mind what the Lord has done for us, and how He accompanied us throughout the night of Aug. 6, 2014 to be displaced with His people. This memory impels us to pray to the Lord so that we might be enlightened to understand His will for our lives during this crisis. Doing so, we would like to share with you our vision, our hope, and also our fears. Taking this as our best opportunity to thank you for being with and accompanying us in our journey, breathing in us the spirit of courage to continue on our way.

Remembering last August, the words of the Psalm 124: 2-3 come to our mind: “If the LORD had not been on our side when people attacked us, they would have swallowed us alive.” It was really a dark night when we left, not knowing what to take with us or what to leave behind. Christians were everywhere on the road, not knowing what direction they should take. The shadow of ISIS’s hatred surrounded everything, and we understood little of what was happening. When we eventually arrived in Kurdistan, many people were homeless in the street; they were like sheep without a shepherd. After few days in Erbil, we realized that our towns in the Plain of Nineveh had been taken by the ISIS, and our return became a distant and uncertain dream. To add insult to injury, it was not only ISIS that increased our loss and our anguish, but also our



non-Christian neighbors, our friends in the neighboring villages, whom we served, taught and gave treatment—they betrayed us in times of trouble and crisis.

It was not easy to accept the fact that we were displaced people, almost abandoned by the Iraqi and Kurdish governments whose initiatives and acts were not up to the level we expected. The church took the responsibility for us, trying to gather and support the IDPs who were scattered all over the region of Kurdistan.

As a community, realizing how dramatic the condition was, we thought of ways to mitigate the crisis and help people with their basic needs. We started our projects with empty hands, but with the help of our Dominican Sisters and Brothers, our friends, and different organizations, we were able to provide the IDPs with food and non-food items. We distributed blankets and mattresses (for 5,000 families); milk, diapers, home ware, towels, soap, and summer blankets (for 10,000 families); shoes (for 740 pupils); 5,000 air-coolers; 600 refrigerators, and 400 water-coolers. Although some of these items were distributed for the IDPs in general, our focus, however, was on the displaced families who rented houses; they are paying significant money for rent and many of them do not have any income.

Additionally, we thought of children who were lost in the midst of this chaos. We opened two kindergartens where children can come for free, and co-operated with some organizations to open charitable clinic for the IDPs. And, we have just got a license to open a primary school, also for free; we rented a place and hope it will be for the benefit of the IDPs. The aim of this is to show the IDPs the loving care of the church.

Having said that, we have to admit that work with and for the IDPs was not always manageable. There were some challenges that really burdened our mission. There are so many IDPs that sometimes we feel as if our work is inconsequential. Also, we were not prepared for this kind of work, nor have we skills to deal with it. Most shocking was the unexpected death of 10 sisters (most of them were in their 70s) in a very short period of time (three months).

Despite that, our ministry continues to be strengthened by the Lord who blesses our efforts no matter how modest they are. Being occupied with such projects, we do not forget our mission to preach the word of God for our troubled people. Since winter, some of our sisters have been preparing 400 children for First Communion in six groups. The last First Communion celebration was on July 12. Moreover, the sisters will start preparing another 100 children for First Communion in towns and villages in Erbil and Duhok. Additionally, sisters continue to go to the IDPs camps to minister: give talks, form groups of young people to have different spiritual exercises, pray with them, arrange Masses (we still remember vividly the first Mass two of our sisters attended at one the IDPs camps when they had no altar to pray, so they used a desk and one of the sisters covered it with her scapular as an altar cover). The main aim of our work is to make sure that IDPs know that they are not ignored or abandoned by the local church.

Thank God, we have just had our annual retreat conducted by Fr. Ifram Saqat, OP who is a Biblical scholar and a psychologist. This helped us to make an interior journey and to recognize kindness, mercy and passion in ourselves and others through forgiveness and reconciliation. We were 68 sisters. They were very blessed days. Hopefully, it will be for the benefit of each sister.

Now, as IDPs, and with the rest of our people, we do face everyday challenges. We wonder how long this will last. Our hearts are filled with sadness and overwhelming grief. We wait but we get nothing, we think but do not understand. What is next? No one knows. Where are we going? Everyone is lost. Yes, we do have shelter but our hearts are anxious and the relationships are truly troubled and the reality is bitter. Most elites have already left, and many are thinking of leaving the country because of the unhealthy condition in which they live. Hundreds of IDPs are living in small, dark and damp (cubicles) caravans. With the help of Pontifical Mission and Oeuvre D'orient, we are working to provide flats for the IDPs. There is an unfinished building of five floors; we thought of building (146) flats in the second and third floor. We depend on people of good will who help the IDPs live with dignity and hope.

We ask you to continue to pray for us. And, thank you for being with us over the past 12 months. Thank you very much and May God Bless you.



Sister Maria Hanna, OP
Prioress General, Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena, Iraq

Elective Chapter of the Vice-Province of St. Augustine in West Africa

The Vice-Province of St. Augustine in West Africa (Senegal, Ivory Coast, Benin Republic, and Burkina Faso) celebrated its Elective Chapter from July 12 to 18, 2015 at St. Dominic priory, Abidjan, Ivory Coast. It was chaired by brother Benjamin Sombel SARR, prior of the priory, whom the thirteen capitulars, on the 15th of July 2015, elected as the new Vice-Prior Provincial for a four year term. Brother Benjamin Sombel SARR accepted his office after the confirmation of his election and succeeds Brother Roger HOUNGBEDJI who served for two terms (eight years) at the head of this entity

In addition to the thirteen capitulars, five guests took part in the Vice-Provincial chapter: Jean Pierre ABOA from the Dominican Laity of Abidjan, Sr Julienne NIKIEMA, from the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation who came from Korhogo, Ivory Coast, and Sister Marie Madeleine MBONIMPA, superior of the Dominican nuns' monastery of the Annunciation who came from Soclogbo, Dassa, Benin Republic.

The Capitular assembly elected as Diffinitors: brothers Clement AHOUCHE, Augustine MISSODEY, George ALAHO and Paul Dago N'DJEMEHISSA. Two brothers were elected as deputies (councillors): Pierre Paul MISSEHOUNGBE and Joachim SOME. The Diffinitory work began on July 21 at St. Dominic priory, Abidjan.

Born on August 8, 1967 (feast of our Holy Father Dominic!) in Fatick, Senegal, Brother Benjamin Sombel SARR made his profession in the Order of Preachers on the 15th of October 1996. He was ordained to the priesthood on the 11th of August 2001. He has a doctorate in dogmatic theology (2006) and in philosophy (2015). The former Socius of the outgoing Vice-Prior Provincial, Brother Benjamin is lecturer and secretary general of the Catholic University of West Africa, Abidjan Campus, Ivory Coast.

It should be noted that the chapter of the Vice-Province of St. Augustine in West Africa was preceded by a Vice-Provincial Assembly on 10 and 11 July, still at St Dominic priory in Abidjan. It was moderated by Brother Emmanuel Ntakarutimana, from the Provincial Vicariate of Rwanda and Burundi, former Socius of the Master of the Order for Africa and Coordinator of Inter-Africa (IAOP). Thirty-three brothers from the five communities of the Vice-Province (Abidjan, Yamoussoukro, Dakar, Cotonou and Ouagadougou) took part in this assembly which had as its general theme: "Common Life". The facilitator had reformulated the theme thus: "Engagement in common life for a new impetus to the mission". To address this issue as it was reformulated Brother Emmanuel proposed to the brothers four discussions in two days, morning and afternoon each day. These four talks each had a theme related to the general theme:

- 1) The quality of our life at the heart of the organization of the Dominican mission.
- 2) Common life & the foundation of our Dominican life.
- 3) Mobilization and management of the common good.
- 4) The celebration of the Jubilee as an occasion of new life for the mission in Francophone West Africa

Thank you to Brother Clement Ahouandjinou for his valuable collaboration. A fruitful mission to all the team, and may God bless the Vice Province of St. Augustine in West Africa.
fr Gabriel Samba, OP.

OP MOLO @ 90 (1925 – 2015)

Gratefully remembering the past, living the present with the passion and embracing the future with hope...
From its humble beginning in Molo 90 years ago, THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF THE MOST HOLY ROSARY OF THE PHILIPPINES founded by the Servant of God María Beatriz del Rosario Arroyo (María Rosario of the Visitation) continued to uphold her vision by its continuing mission in the various apostolate of the Church.



With a present membership of over 250 professed sisters, the Congregation runs multiple schools, colleges, clinics, orphanages, retreat houses and several missions abroad. Nationally, they are present in the Archdioceses of Capiz, Jaro, and Manila, as well as the Dioceses of Bacolod, Imus, Mati, San José de Antique and Tagum.

The Congregation also has an overseas community of sisters in the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands; the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ngong in Kenya; Rome, the parish of San Quirico d'Orcia in Valdorcia, Tuscany, and the Archdiocese of Siena-Colle di Val d'Elsa-Montalcino, in Italy; and the Archdiocese of San Francisco and the Diocese of Honolulu in the United States.

As followers of Mother Rosario the Sisters are constantly active in the works of service and charity surrendering their own lives to bring others into the life of God's kingdom.

Meeting of the International Commission of Dominican Lay Fraternities

The Dominican Lay Fraternity of Saint Dominic in Salamanca hosted the meeting of the International Commission of lay Dominicans, presided by fr Rui Lopes, General Promoter for the Laity and his collaborator, fr Manolo Pupini. There were lay Dominicans from Germany (Klaus Bornewasser and Ulrika), United States (Stephen and Nancy), Philippines (Belén Tangco), Nigeria (Adenike Emeke) and Puerto Rico (Héctor L. Márquez).

The fraternity welcomed all the members, explaining the presence of the Dominicans in Salamanca since 1222, four years after the creation of the University of Salamanca and just after the death of Saint Dominic. In line with the Order's culture of establishing convents in university areas, necessary for its charism of study and preaching. Soon after, groups of lay Dominicans appeared near the convents of brothers and nuns. These lay Dominicans soon became active participants in the preaching, taking part in the Dominican charism.

The most important moments of the convent of San Esteban were reviewed, from its movement from San Juan el Blanco to the Church of San Esteban, through the influence of important figures like Vicente Ferrer, Colón, Pedro de Córdoba, Antón de Montesinos, Francisco de Vitoria, Domingo de Soto, etc. This was also the most difficult times of exclaustation and abandonment of the convent of the Dominican friars and its recovery through the presence of French Dominicans of the Province of Toulouse. Today there are around thirty brothers of all ages from four continents who live in the convent, devoted not only to research and teaching, but also to preaching, youth groups and fraternities, social groups, etc.

The fraternity of Saint Dominic in Salamanca consists of three groups of about thirty people of different ages, living the Dominican charism of preaching and prayer in the city, speaking with God and about God in different places: the family, catechism, education, writing, each according to his/her capability. Study and meditation of the word is important in our fraternity, many of the members come from the School of Theology, but their formation continues in study and preparation within the fraternal groups. Others live the charism of the fraternity by helping the sick, or working with Cáritas or Acción Verapaz.

After the presentation of the fraternity and the convent of San Esteban, we all individually, shared the wealth of our participation in different places where every member is present as a lay Dominican, from Salamanca to the United States, from Germany to Nigeria, from the Philippines to Puerto Rico. It was an enriching conversation that ended with the intervention of fr Rui Lopes in which he explained the presence of the commission in Salamanca.

Prayer is important in our fraternal life. After vespers, we shared a typical dinner of a local meal from Salamanca. The fraternal conversation continued in the beautiful gardens of the convent of San Esteban.

Juan Antonio Mateos Pérez, OP

Recession and Vocations?

One thing that I've heard from several people when I mention the surge in Dominican vocations (and the surge of many dioceses and orders male and female) is "Oh, it must be the recession." Truly, I have not met



one religious who set aside marital joys, self-determination, and wealth because he or she couldn't find a job. The man who sets aside his personal dreams to more perfectly subject himself to God is not primarily saying "no" to the world, but saying "yes" to a renewed life with God.

I am a Dominican brother of the Province of St. Joseph studying for the priesthood in Washington DC. After the ordination of eight of our brothers, there are over fifty of us studying for the priesthood or preparing to live life as a consecrated brother, about to be joined by fifteen more on July 25.

Among those roughly 75 men are lawyers, a medical doctor, a congressional staffer, professional musicians, a radio host, several PhDs and professors, a particle physicist from Stanford, a former Google employee, a dean of admissions at a medical school, Ivy Leaguers, Golden Domers, and more who were successful in the world, but sought a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church, and desired to serve his people.

In just a few days, another gainfully employed man will leave his nets behind to follow the Lord in the way of St. Dominic, assistant editor J. David Nolan, who has been working here at First Things since 2013.

Writing for Fare Forward last year, Nolan wrote,

Monasticism looks insane to anyone committed to a material rendition of rational choice theory, but as St. Paul writes, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Religious life reminds us that any discussion of balance makes sense only when there is an explicit pivot point. And it teaches us that, in order to be perfect, we cannot divide and conquer—we have to throw all our eggs in one basket and hope they hatch on Easter. This is a lesson that the laity and the world at large have wavered on and need to relearn. It is a lesson that consecrated religious are uniquely qualified to teach.

People don't leave all the "important" things of life because they can't handle it or because the chips are down. Rather, men or women join religious life because they have perceived the call from One who transcends all earthly things to serve him, and through him, his people. And like the three men who saw the Lord lying in a manger, they can never return the way they came, even if they discover that religious life is not what God has planned for them in their lives.

If there is a worldly cause for the rising numbers of religious vocations, it is the realization that the world today (and in every age) cannot provide the invisible riches that come only from the love of God—a love beyond all understanding.

Dominic Bouck, O.P., is a Dominican brother of the Province of St. Joseph and a summer intern at First Things

Ordination in the Province of Nigeria

It was a day of joy for the members of the Province of St. Joseph the Worker, Nigeria and Ghana, and the family and friend of seven brothers who were raised to the Sacred Orders on the 18th of July, 2015.

Bros Patrick Neil Morrison (a native of Ohio, USA) and Bro. Joseph Osunde were ordained to the priesthood, while Bros Richard Odok, Charles Onwuama, Clement Oloruuntoba, Lawrence Ejembi and Patrick Okoye were ordained deacons by Most. Rev. Dr. Gabriel Dunai, Catholic Bishop of Auchi Diocese.

The Ordination which was graced by a large crowd took place in the Dominican House of Studies, Ibadan, Nigeria. Bro Uchechukwu Odikpo was at it again with the gift of a "mass box" cake.

Important Conference on the Influences of the Dominicans in the Middle Ages

With the 800th anniversary of the Dominican Order approaching in 2016, Dr Eleanor Giraud of Lincoln College, Oxford, is organising a significant 3-day conference on the influences of the Dominicans in the medieval period.

We spoke with Dr Giraud in order to discover her motivation and something of the outstanding programme being offered to participants.



1. *How did you first become interested in the study of the Dominicans of the middle ages?*

As a doctoral student, I was interested in the production of music books in Paris—thirteenth-century Paris was a hub of book-making activity, and a site of much music-making, but how music books were made had not previously been examined. Over the course of my first year, I kept finding connections between Dominican chant books: books that had been decorated by the same group of artists, books that were supposedly copied from one another, and so on. By the end of the year, I had decided to focus on the production and notation of Dominican manuscripts in particular. I was lucky to meet Br Matthew Jarvis in my Latin class, who was a novice in Cambridge at the time. He helped me greatly in my studies, and introduced me to the librarian in Cambridge, Fr Aidan Nichols, who was very accommodating in letting me use the Blackfriars' library whenever I needed. I've been touched by the kindness that Dominicans have shown me over the years: I certainly picked a good Order to study! I've since moved on from studying book production, but I've stuck with the Dominicans: I'm now examining the early forms of Dominican chant.

2. *As a specialist in medieval Dominican chant, what do you find most distinctive about it?*

One of the distinctive aspects about Dominican chant is its brevity in comparison to other chant repertoires: the Dominicans tended to eliminate repetitions of notes or melodic patterns, and cut down on extensive melismas (that is, several notes sung to one syllable, e.g. saaaaaactus). This was probably related to the focus in Dominican life on dedicating oneself to study, even over worship. One of the early Master Generals of the Order, Humbert of Romans, said 'A short Office with study is better than a long [Office] with study hindered' and he even recommended that if the brothers accidentally slept in, then the Cantor should hurry things along and shorten the length of the readings at Matins! So it's no surprise that the early Dominicans sought to cut down the length of their chant.

3. *Looking ahead to the conference you are organising in Oxford this year, on the Influences of the Dominican Order in the Middle Ages, can you give us a flavour of what is on offer for participants?*

As the conference is interdisciplinary, there is probably something here for everyone! We have various panels covering how the Dominicans influenced art history, music, liturgy, and book production—the latter being the subject of our keynote paper, given by Mary Rouse. In addition, there are panels looking at the interaction of medieval Dominicans across different parts of Europe. With the conference taking place in Oxford, we couldn't pass up the opportunity to hear more about the early history of the Dominicans in the city, both through academic presentations as well as through a walking tour of medieval Oxford, led by archaeologist George Lambrick. Another highlight of the conference will be a concert of music that can be associated with the Dominican Order—both Dominican chant, and scraps of polyphony found as binding fragments in Dominican books.

4. *If our readers are interested in taking part in the conference, how can they book a place?*

Further details about the conference, including the programme and link to the registration page, are available on our webpage, but should they have any further questions, please contact me: Dr Eleanor Giraud (eleanor.giraud@lincoln.ox.ac.uk).

Conference dates: 10-12 September 2015. Please note, registration deadline is Friday 21st August!

[A Conference on The Influences of the Dominican Order in the Middle Ages](#)

Thursday, September 10, 2015 (All day) to Saturday, September 12, 2015 (All day)

Taylor Institution, Lincoln College, and Blackfriars Hall, Oxford

From its modest foundations in 1216, the Dominican Order grew rapidly in the first century of its existence, establishing itself across Europe as a learned Order of Preachers. This interdisciplinary conference will explore the influences of the Dominican Order on all aspects of medieval life, encompassing the large-scale influences of the Order and the legacy of its prominent figures, as well as the impact that the Order had on those that came into contact with it.

Registration

Registration is now open! [Click here to register.](#)

****The deadline for registration is Friday 21st August.****

The conference registration fee is £80 for all three days, or £30 per day. The registration fee includes a sandwich lunch and light refreshments on each day.



The conference will open with an optional walking tour of medieval Oxford, and on the Friday evening there will be a concert of music associated with the Dominican Order in Lincoln College Chapel, both of which are included in the registration fee. The concert on Friday will be followed by the conference dinner in Lincoln College; the price for the three-course dinner with wine is £25. (If you would like a vegetarian meal or have other dietary requirements, please indicate this during registration.)

We have a small number of student bursaries worth £25 available, which will be awarded on a first come, first served basis. If you are a student and interested in applying for a bursary please contact Eleanor Giraud directly.

Conference programme

The keynote paper will be delivered by Mary Rouse, on 'The Vital Impact of the Dominicans on Books at the University of Paris, 1217-1350'. The programme will feature papers on the Dominican influence in England, Northern Europe, Italy, Eastern Europe, and the Byzantine world; the influence of Friars on other movements and communities; Dominican influence on architecture, art, books, music and liturgy; and influential Dominican philosophers and theologians. In addition, the conference will include a walking tour of medieval Oxford, and a concert of music that can be associated with the Dominican Order.

Accommodation

Single accommodation with ensuite bathroom will be available at Lincoln College's Museum Road site, a short walk from the Taylor Institution (Lady Abraham House, Museum Road, Oxford, OX1 3PX). Accommodation costs £45/night, which includes a continental breakfast and wifi.

Conference Venues

The conference will take primarily in the Taylor Institution (known locally as the 'Taylorian'), Saint Giles', Oxford, OX1 3NA. Lunches will be served in the Aula of the Dominican House, also on St Giles'. Friday evening's concert and dinner will take place in Lincoln College's main site on Turl Street (Oxford, OX1 3DR). Accommodation is provide on Lincoln College's Museum Road site (Lady Abraham House, Museum Road, Oxford, OX1 3PX). Click here to view a map of the conference venues.

Conference Organisers

Dr Eleanor Giraud, Lincoln College, Oxford,
Fr Gregory Schnakenberg, OP, Blackfriars Hall, Oxford.

All enquiries should be sent to Eleanor Giraud: eleanor.giraud@lincoln.ox.ac.uk

The conference has been generously supported by: Oxford Medieval Studies, sponsored by The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (TORCH); The Michael Zilkha Fund, Lincoln College; Blackfriars, Oxford; and The Plainsong and Medieval Music Society.

Oxford Medieval Studies

Contact name: Eleanor Giraud

Contact email: eleanor.giraud@lincoln.ox.ac.uk

Audience: Open to all

[Fr Jame Channan, OP receives the "Global Ambassador of Peace Award"](#)

Fr James Channan of the Vice Province of Pakistan is not new to the ministry of interreligious dialogue. He is the Director of the Peace Center in Lahbor, Pakistan and also the Regional Coordinator of the United Religions Initiative (URI), Pakistan.

As part of his tireless efforts in promoting interreligious dialogue, peace and harmony in Pakistan, he has recently published a book titled, "Path of Love: A Call for Interfaith Harmony". This is a collection of articles, papers and speeches given by Fr James at national and international events, various interviews, commentaries and tributes about Fr James' life and work. The main focus of the book is "Love" as a tool for unity, respect and tolerance among people of diverse religious beliefs.



A group of UN affiliated NGOs organized a ceremony to launch the book at the United Nations, New York. The launching took place at the Tillman Chapel of the UN Church Center on the 16th of July 2015.

During that ceremony, Fr James was given the “Global Ambassador of Peace Award” by the Institute of International Social Development, an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the ECOSOC of the United Nations. The event is co-sponsored by a group of UN affiliated NGOs including; Royal Academy of Science International Trust, Legion of Good Will, United Religions Initiative at the UN, Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem, Project Harmony, Spiritual United Nations among others.

We rejoice with Fr James and wish him the best as he continues to work for interreligious harmony and peace in Pakistan.

The Continuous fight for Human Rights all over the world

Reflections on 29th Session of UN Human Rights Council, 15 June – 3 July 2015

I attended the UN HRC Session in Geneva in June 2015, accompanied for two weeks by our Socius for Apostolic Life, Orlando Rueda Acevedo and also by our volunteer representative in Geneva, local lay Dominican leader, Evelyn von Steffens. Such sessions are always opportunities to get an update on human rights situations around the world. Since so much is being addressed, we have to be selective in the sessions and side events that we attend. This is determined largely by the priorities that we have established to follow in the UN, although other important issues for the Church and the Order are also followed at times.

Our first priority is to assist the development of a just global governance and to focus especially on promoting peace in the situations of war and conflict where our Dominican brothers and sisters are present. This takes in the issues of disarmament, freedom of religion and inter-religious dialogue as well as the increased migration and human trafficking that the wars spawn.

Our second priority is to focus on the destruction of the environment and livelihoods through business activities initiated by states and big corporations and the impact this has especially on indigenous people. This also takes in the issues of climate change, land grabbing for mining and logging, and sources of energy.

What follows is a brief reflection on the experience of the Council, rather anecdotal, without any pretension to be a full report. It is intended simply to give our brothers and sisters a taste of what happened there.

Highlights:

- Many states are refusing to cooperate with UN Special Procedures (monitoring structures). Only 50% of communications by these structures received response from states! There is a resistance to country-specific investigations or mandates as ‘being politically motivated’ and ‘violating national sovereignty’.
- However, in the words of the *High Commissioner*: “States complain about ‘naming and shaming’, but it is the actions done by states and not the naming that shames!”
- For the first time ever, the European Union voted for a resolution condemning Israel.

Country situations noted or dealt with:

- *Syria*: There are now 7 million displaced people and no end to the war in sight.
- *Ukraine*: Russian arms continue to flow while Russia continues to blame Ukraine for the conflict.
- *West Papua* (officially part of Indonesia): For the first time, the High Commissioner mentioned the human rights violations taking place there. Dominicans for Justice and Peace has been part of the International Coalition for Papua for several years.
- *Myanmar*: A Dominican participated in a workshop in January 2015 organised by Pax Romana to prepare a report for the Myanmar Universal Periodic Review that will take place in October/November 2015. A meeting of the organisations signing this report was held to discuss follow up.
- *Israel/Palestine*: The Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Gaza war in 2014 was presented. It severely criticised Israel’s actions. Israel ran a big campaign to discredit the report. Nevertheless, the USA was again alone in voting against the resolution condemning Israel.



- *Venezuela*: With the political crisis, there is an increase in poverty, excessive use of force and torture, violation of detainees and intimidation of human rights defenders.
- *Central African Republic*: I met the Independent Expert on the human rights situation in CAR, the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary General based in Bangui, and an Imam from Bangui who works closely with our brothers there. I informed them of my intention to visit CAR before the end of the year.
- *Iraq*: Together with Caritas Internationalis, Dominicans for Justice and Peace requested a meeting with the High Commissioner for Human Rights to discuss the situation in Iraq. It was intended to bring fr Timothy Radcliffe OP to share the experience of his visit to Iraq last January. Unfortunately, the response arrived only the day before the requested meeting, offering a meeting with the Deputy High Commissioner. Being too late to bring in the desired participants, the meeting had to be cancelled. We are hoping to organise a side event on Iraq in the next session of the Human Rights Council in September.
- *Peru*: We had a follow up meeting with a Peru Mission official after meeting the Ambassador in November 2014 to seek action on the marginalisation of the indigenous people in the Amazon jungle reported by our brothers there. There is a possibility that the Peruvian Minister in charge of Indigenous People will visit Geneva in September. If so, a meeting with her will be arranged for us.

Issues we followed in the Council:

- *Human Trafficking*:
 - It is terribly exacerbated in situations of armed conflicts and disasters.
 - We saw an excellent film on Human trafficking, “Talking to the Trees” which is very useful for awareness raising. It can be accessed by writing to rightviewcinema@gmail.com . There is no fixed cost, but a donation is welcome.
- *Ebola*: Many cases are still being reported in Guinea and Sierra Leone. No new cases had been reported in Liberia for some time, but in the last week of the Council, new cases were again reported. So, it is not yet over.
- *Reprisals against human rights defenders*: In 2014, we were part of a campaign to free a friend and colleague detained in Sri Lanka, Ruki Fernando. This successfully resulted in his early release, but he received several restrictions, including requiring him to ask for court permission everytime he wanted to travel. In the last week of the Council, we received the good news that his travel restrictions were removed.
- *Freedom of Religion and Gender-related rights*: In many countries, religion and sacred texts are used to legitimise discrimination and to harrass and even persecute people who do not conform to gender stereotypes.
- *Migration and Integration*: Good policies of integration can transform migrants from being a problem to being an asset.
- *Climate Change Conference in Paris, December 2015*:
 - Climate Change is not just an environmental or economic issue! It is a spiritual and ethical issue. Pope Francis’ Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, received a lot of attention in many meetings. To address climate change, we need a change in global power structures (an authority to implement global decisions). Paris must be seen as a starting point and not an end.
 - In meetings with the WCC and Earthjustice, possibilities were explored about what Dominicans can do at the Paris conference. Dominicans for Justice and Peace will join the Geneva Inter-Faith Forum on Climate Change.
- *Family*:
 - The first meeting of a Catholic NGO Working Group on the Family was held, of which Dominicans for Justice and Peace is a member. I stressed the importance of us not getting sucked into the ideological polarisation that characterises this issue in the UN. We should rather be a force for constructive dialogue.
 - A new resolution on “Protection of the Family”, as it did last last year, provoked a polarised response around the lack of explicit references to the diversity of families and the rights of individuals in families, the “uncritical” promotion of the family as the guardian of traditions, and the recognition of the family (rather than individuals) as rights-holders.
- *Self-determination of Indigenous People*: Over the centuries, the indigenous people of North America and Australia (and many other places) who had their land taken from them, have either been ignored or decimated by diseases brought in by the colonisers or caused by radioactive minerals mined and other activities. Clinton apologised to Hawaii in 1993 and Obama apologised to Native Americans in 2009, but there has been no follow up. Only in Australia, after Kevin Rudd apologised to the Aborigines in 2008, was some compensation at least given.



- *Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) and Human Rights*: The treaty prohibits the transfer of arms if there is any risk of corruption or use that would violate human rights. This needs to be widely publicised and implemented.

Conclusion

One can leave three weeks of such a session feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the suffering being experienced every day by millions and millions of people throughout the world. It is nevertheless a privileged opportunity to face this tragic reality at once and everywhere. One can leave with a sense of powerlessness or, if we get focused, we can make small contributions to challenging and promoting justice and peace in places where our Dominicans are engaged. Hopefully the latter will prevail!

Mike Deeb OP

[The calendar of the Pilgrim Rosary](#)

The calendar of the Pilgrim Rosary of the Jubilee is now online. You can download it by clicking [here](#). In this document, you will find the following elements:

- The two days given to each monastery for the Pilgrim Rosary. The colors represent the different continents (blue for Europe, red for America, yellow for Asia and green for Africa). Logically, the first monastery is Prouilhe. The last one, because of the Jubilee in 2017, is the one of Fatima.
- Each month, one day, in green, is dedicated to a particular intention that links liturgy and apostolates. All the dates are given in the first column of the first page. Here are the dates and the intention dedicated to them:

2015

- 07-Nov - Opening of the Jubilee - Prayer for entrusting the Jubilee
- 22-Dec - Anniversary of the approval of the Order - Prayer for Vocations in the Order

2016

- 17-Jan - The Flight to Egypt - Prayer for migrants and refugees
- 11-Feb - World Day of the Sick - Prayer for the sick and those who care for them
- 19-Mar - Lent - "Free the captives" - Prayer for prisoners
- 03-April - Sunday of Mercy - Prayer for people at the end of their life
- 08-May - Our Lady, patroness of the Order - Prayer for the suffering members of the Order
- 08-Jun - Bl. Diana and Cecilia - Prayer for the nuns of the Order
- 04-Jul - Bl. Pier Giorgio Frassati - Prayer for World Youth Day in Krakow
- 22-Aug - Mary, queen of the universe - Prayer with other Orders
- 08-Sept - Nativity of Our Lady - Prayer for teachers and students
- 07-Oct - Our Lady of the Rosary - Prayer for Peace
- 20-Nov - Christ the King - Prayer for leaders and superiors
- 12-Dec - Our Lady of Guadalupe - Prayer for unborn children and families

2017

- 21-Jan - Closure of the Jubilee - Prayer in thanksgiving for the Jubilee

- 18 days remained at the end of the Jubilee. We will use them to pray a novena in preparation for the Jubilee of Fatima!

I wish you a beautiful Jubilee... with the Rosary!

Fr. Louis-Marie ARIÑO-DURAND, o.p.

General Promoter of the Rosary

['Laudato Si': An Encyclical of Re-Membering](#)

Molloy College in Rockville Centre, Long Island, offered a new course this past spring semester that I designed and co-taught. It was entitled, "The Rights of Nature." The course description explained that



students would examine various paradigms for understanding the Earth / Human relationship from “biblically inspired” dominion, through conservation and protection, and ending with kinship paradigms which promote the rights of mother Earth.

After viewing the outstanding new video entitled “Green Fire” chronicling the life of the founding father of Land Ethic, Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), the students were asked about their relationship with their homeland of Long Island. One student spoke out boldly, “We have an abusive relationship with all land, not only Long Island. All we do is take from the land.” I didn’t expect that response and with a sigh of relief thought to myself, “Well, something is getting through.”

School is out for the summer, so I have no way of bringing the class back to explore the Pope’s new encyclical, but I wonder, if the tables were turned, what grade my students would give Francis for his encyclical. I have a strong hunch they would be pleased with the pope’s “whole-making” or “re-membering,” otherwise known in the encyclical as “integral ecology.”

It’s a clever extrapolation of Paul VI’s phrase “integral development,” which appeared in the 1967 encyclical, “On the Progress of Peoples.” The concept was the brain child of the French Dominican economist, prophet and missionary to fishermen of Northwestern France, Louis-Joseph Lebret (1897-1966). Paul VI, citing Lebret’s work in a footnote, explains it this way: “In order to be authentic, development must be complete; integral that is, it has to promote the good of every person and the whole person” (14). This is an important back-drop for an understanding of the Pope Francis’s “integral ecology.”

Francis references Paul VI’s work in the early pages of his encyclical, pointing to his prescient warning about a potential ecological catastrophe (4). This pope’s contribution is to enshrine forever in Catholic social thought the connection between “the good of every person and the whole person,” and Earth and an articulation of our identity as “Earthlings” with all its subsequent implications. As he writes, “. . . how inseparable the bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace”(10).

In a kind of lament, he tells us in the opening paragraphs, “We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the Earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters” (2). In the fourth chapter devoted in its entirety to “Integral Ecology,” he reminds us once again: “Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it” (139). I would hope my students give the pontiff credit for his elaboration of one of Thomas Berry’s “Principles of a Functional Cosmology,” namely, “Earth is primary, and the human is derivative. “

So, whole-making number one for the pope: Earth and human are re-membered.

Another example of Francis’s whole-making is to be found in his statements in Chapter One about not only climate change, which has received the lion’s share of attention and rightly so, but also water, loss of biodiversity, decline in the quality of human life, breakdown of society and global inequality. It is an impressive “body scan” of the planet and most timely in its utterance. Not only does the world await the U.N. conference in Paris in December with hopes of a binding global treaty to reduce carbon emissions, (the pope does make several veiled references to this fact without directly mentioning the coming meeting), but the evening before the official release of the encyclical, the news carried reports about the dire state of the world’s aquifers. Twenty-one of the world’s 37 largest aquifers – in locations from India and China to the United States and France – have passed their sustainability tipping points, a NASA report tell us. The report goes on to elaborate that this means more water was removed than replaced during a decade-long study period. Later on in the encyclical, in a comment sure to raise the ire of some, the pope in speaking about the governance of the oceans, calls for “agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of the so called global commons”(174). The inclusion of the full range of issues indicates that the Pope recognizes that again as Thomas Berry would say: the Earth is a whole and cannot be saved in fragments.

More points from my students for sure and whole-making number two for the pope: Earth, her one water system, diversity of species, flora and fauna, and human life are re-membered.



Whole-making number three: more than once in the encyclical the pope reminds us, “that it is not enough to think of different species merely as potential resources to be exploited while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves” (33). “In our time,” the pontiff boldly states, “the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish;” rather, “. . . other living beings have a value of their own in God’s eyes: by their mere existence they bless God and give him glory” (69).

The “biblically inspired” dominion model of relating to creation has been permanently retired with the words: “. . . we must forcefully reject the notion that our being made in the image of God justifies absolute domination over other creatures” (67). The “other-than-human” has been re-membered in the affirmation of its worth in God’s eyes.

Yes, more points for the pontiff from my students, for as they would know from studying Berry, “The Earth is a communion of subjects not a collection of objects.”

The pope turns to the bishops of Bolivia for yet another area for whole-making, which is a lynch-pin of the entire document: “Everyday experience and scientific research shows that the greatest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest”(48). It is a “no-brainer” for some, but in a global society like our own where the poor are institutionally and systematically marginalized and kept out of sight and thus out of mind, more points go to the pope for making the invisible visible. He tells us, “. . . a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment so as to hear both the cry of Earth and the cry of poor” (49). He reinforces this point in ways too numerous to list. Two stand out for their far reaching implications: Profit cannot be the sole criterion (187), and “. . . we need to think of containing growth . . . the time has come to accept decreased growth in some parts of the world, in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth”(193).

Whole-making number five: The poor are re-membered into the one community of life. They are not other, they are us.

Integral development and now integral ecology are all about making wholes where artificial and fallacious divisions have grown up over centuries. I recall vividly an experience I had years ago. I began to feel as if I was bringing more of myself to prayer than ever before. It felt strange at first but then really right. It was an experience of alignment and integration, a re-membering of myself even. I came to understand it as born of my growing embrace of the Universe Story. I knew then that as I came to prayer in the morning, and as I moved throughout day, I carried the 13.8-billion-year story with all its unfolding – other-than human and human life – in my very body. I walked with a new integrity and joy. I carried the pain of centuries as well. This is what happens as we approach wholeness. This is how I feel after reading the encyclical.

In the first chapter Francis articulates the goal of the encyclical. He says, “Our goal is not to amass information or satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it” (19). It certainly had that impact on me. I am not sure about how my students would grade the encyclical, but I would give it an “A.”

Margaret Galiardi, OP (Dominican Sister from Amityville, New York)

"The big challenge of our time is to recover hope". Timothy Radcliffe OP

An interview with fr Timothy Radcliffe, OP

Timothy Radcliffe OP is a Dominican friar and served as Master of the Dominicans, the Order of Preachers, for nine years. He inspires in his addresses and retreats in all corners of the globe, and is one of the best loved Christian spiritual teachers of our times.

Father Radcliffe, Pope Francis has recently named you “consultor” of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. What does it mean to you?

I am grateful. The work of the Pontifical Council is very important. It’s a way to support the Pope, who has put this at the heart of his mission. Most people were named by Pope Benedict, but I was named later, a bit out of the blue.



Does this imply you will move to Rome?

I accepted because I am able to continue to preach and lecture around the world while based in Oxford. Whenever the Council needs me I can go to Rome, to offer whatever support I can.

As a Dominican Father what is your relationship to the Pope?

We feel a deep link as he is the centre of unity. Pope Francis is a man for whom I have enormous admiration, so I am very happy to give him any support.

How often have you met him?

I met him in Buenos Aires when he was Archbishop, and then had a long conversation eighteen months ago in the Vatican. Then a third time, in December, I was present for a meeting of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. We had a meeting of Christians (Catholics and Anglicans), Muslims (Shia and Sunni), and an Argentinian rabbi who is a close friend of the Pope.

Do you support the Pope because of his agenda for change? Are there many changes afoot?

I have supported all the Popes, but I love the new freedom that he is breathing into the Church. He believes that the Holy Spirit is poured upon us, and we do not know where it may take us. He realised in a retreat, reflecting on his term as a Jesuit Provincial, that he had been a bit too controlling. You have to trust people. The Spirit is given to each of us. I think the Pope is not trying to push his personal agenda, he is trying to encourage free and open discussion at all levels of the church.

What did you find in your six months of sabbatical when you left your role as Master of the Dominican Order?

The purpose of the six months was to reflect on the meaning of “virtue”. I was once in Slovakia with a Polish brother and he said that for St. Thomas Aquinas the whole point of Christian life was to share God’s joy and God’s freedom. I found this a fascinating thought that I wished to explore. Often people think that morality is about rules you must obey. The pursuit of virtue is about growing strong and joyful in God’s friendship. This is a new way, and also an old way, of seeing the moral life. It was the mediaeval tradition as found in Aquinas.

What are your major concerns today?

I would say the crisis in the Middle East, which is why I went to Baghdad, which used to be a great centre for Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Now there are no more Jews left in Baghdad, who had been there for 2,500 years. They arrived in the Babylonian exile 500 years before Christ, and now they are gone. The Christians too are disappearing, only 10% of what they were. I stayed in the centre of Baghdad where there was a thriving Christian community and now there is almost nobody left. So many states are in crisis: Libya, Syria, Iraq and the Yemen. This has generated a vast movement of people seeking a home in which they can survive. I think it is the great crisis of our time.

What is going to happen?

I don’t know. These migrants are exploited. Networks of traffickers are making money from them and then abandoning them. They queue to come to Europe and there are thousands waiting in Calais to cross to England. Faced with this vast tragedy we have, as Pope Francis said, lost the ability to weep.

Do you think Europe will become a Muslim world?

No, I don’t believe so. I think there is a real crisis of faith for young Muslims in Europe and in the Middle East. I think the new generation in France and the UK have just the same struggle with faith as young Christians do.

Why?

It is complex. Because they face secularism and because they experience their own religion as not liberating. Many young Muslims find their faith shaken by the brutality of ISIS and the conflict between Shia and Sunni.

Are people less religious?

People are less religious, certainly in England, one of the most secular societies.

Why is England like this?



In some ways, our society is marked by fundamentalism. There is a scientific fundamentalism, which thinks that everything can be explained by science. The Church has nothing against science as long as it does not make totalitarian claims! Then there is market fundamentalism, which reduces human beings to homo economicus, economic man – people seen as consumers and producers, functions of the market. Religious fundamentalism is a response to these. I think many young people are searching for a vision of humanity which preserves a sense of our beauty and dignity. We have lots of young University students coming to Mass here, so I am not pessimistic at all.

And do they want to join the Order?

We have an increase in vocations in the Dominican Order. Here at Blackfriars we have 28 brothers and an average age of about 35. Religious life is not finished!

Is the Catholic church changing?

I think the big change is that often there have been divisions in the church between progressive and conservative, now we are getting beyond that. The new generation usually transcends that polarisation, which is alien to Catholicism. We are breathing an air which is fresher. When I look at our young Friars here, you cannot describe them as either conservative or progressive, they want to find what is best. I don't like these categories, for example when people say to me, "O, you are very progressive." I do not wish to be confined by any box!

Is the Catholic church still strong?

Yes and No. It is true that in Western Europe many fewer people are attending Mass every week, and yet religion is more than ever a point of reference. I think if you look at the Pope's Encyclical on Ecology it is very interesting that many people are saying, "If anybody can get the world to face the ecological crisis it is the Catholic church." Politicians lack the conviction. Much industry lacks the motivation. Maybe it is only the Pope who can achieve something. So that is a significant strength.

The church has been under siege, with both financial and sexual problems?

And a loss of credibility. Certainly the whole sexual abuse crisis has been absolutely terrible, but I hope and pray that the church is becoming the safest place in the world for children now. We were the first into the crisis, but now it has hit the BBC, government, schools, NHS – you see it very widespread. So I hope the church, with all its humiliation and self-reflection, can now help society to be a better place for children.

And the Pope was very important in this?

He has been very strong and has made powerful moves. We must admit that Pope Benedict began to make important steps. Often we contrast Francis and Benedict too much. There is more continuity between them than is generally admitted.

Are they friends?

I hope so.

Is it strange to have two Popes?

Well, we will get used to it. It think it was very courageous of Pope Benedict to resign.

Why?

Because there was huge pressure on John Paul II not to resign. He wanted to, but the pressure on him was not to. Benedict was very clever, he didn't tell anybody. If he had tried to tell anybody they would have stopped him.

You go around the world to preach. What are people looking for?

They look for hope. The big challenge of our time is to recover hope. Many young people are unemployed, the economic and political crisis all over the Muslim world, our uncertainty about the future of the planet – the most important thing is for people to hope. There is a Eucharistic Congress in the Philippines in January 2016 which will take the theme of hope.

Have people lost hope? The hope of what?



Happiness; The hope of finding meaning. People distrust institutions. Politicians think about the next election, journalists about the next edition, companies the next financial year. We live with a very short term awareness. The Church should embody the long memory of humanity and its long term aspirations.

Is this because of the internet and technical progress?

I think it's one element, connected with a detachment from the rhythm of nature. Everything has to be instantaneous. In England this is the "Now Generation". Christianity teaches us to hope by reminding we can dare to hope for a future, even if it comes slowly.

Is there a nervousness?

The English expression is, "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Which means we have to enjoy life, because tomorrow we may not be. Life is longer, we now know this world was created 13 billion years ago and humanity 400,000 years ago, and each of us is living much longer, so on one hand we have a sense of enormous time, but on the other we want to live for now. It's the paradox of our culture.

How can we find our spirituality?

We have instant access to information but there is a crisis of superficiality, the attention span is very limited. The Superior General of the Jesuits, Adolfo Nicolás, talked of "the globalisation of superficiality." We must dare to ask the complex questions which take time to reflect upon. And we must dare to ask these questions in collaboration with those young people who are wrestling with them, whether in literature, art or poetry.

Should religion be simple?

God is utterly simple. So simple that we cannot understand Him. I think the life of religion should make us stronger and more coherent. But it is difficult to become truly simple.

How can you be happy in such a terrible world?

Because I meet wonderful people all the time and I live the contemplative life. I went to Baghdad. It's not easy in Baghdad, but I met extraordinary people and had a very happy time there. I see great beauty wherever I go. There is a lot of terrible suffering, but people meet suffering with great courage. I used to go to Rwanda during the crisis, once every year. I wanted to give hope, but I found they gave me hope.

Is God a necessity for humans?

People often ask if God is relevant for our lives. No, God is more than that. Everything is relevant in so many as it leads us to God, who is the point and meaning of everything. I think that everyone has some sense of an ultimate meaning, even if they do not call this God.

What is the purpose of religion?

For a Christian, it is that we are made for happiness, which is God. God is pure happiness and that's what we are made for. Religion is the invitation to share God's happiness. Religion is not about being good. You are good, not because it is required, but because it's wonderful, a joy. The French writer Bernanos said the only happiness is to be a saint. To enter the religious world is to move from living in black and white to living in colour.

Have you ever had a crisis in faith?

I wouldn't say I had doubts about God's existence. I have had periods of being bored by religion, when I thought God seemed absent, when everything became grey.

What did you do when it all became flat?

You carry on and say your prayers. I once fell in love with a woman and then it was very difficult, because I could imagine a life with her. We remain friends, but I had to say, "I am somebody called to this life, this is the life for me."

Are you very supportive of gay people?

I think that we should give thanks for the gifts of gay people. I think each person has to find their own way to love. God is present in every love. Personally I do not believe in gay marriage, but that is a long topic. But I do believe gay people are a blessing. Gay people have a lot to give us, and we should welcome their gifts.



As a friar you can't marry? Or have a sex life?

As friars or monks we have the possibility of fantastic friendship with people, friendship is absolutely the centre of our lives. Chastity frees us for deep intimacy with people.

Are you tired of all this obsessive sexual interest?

There is a curious obsession with sex while at the same time our society often trivialises it, as if it were merely a recreation. We must welcome people whatever paths they have taken. We must find a way for people who are divorced and remarried to come home to the Eucharist, even if this involves a clear reflection on what happened. We must respect and honour the complexity of people's lives, and the complex paths by which they come to God. The temptation is to reduce religion to morality, and reduce morality to sex. I think that's very limiting.

Does education make for less racism and hate?

In Baghdad the Dominicans founded the Baghdad Academy of Human Sciences, with 500 pupils, 70% of whom are Muslims. We teach anthropology, psychology, philosophy and the scientific study of religion, because the best opposition to fundamentalism is education. The enemy is not religion. The enemy is reductionism, fundamentalism. St. Dominic sent the friars to Universities to study, to Bologna, Paris, Oxford.

Are people frightened in the Middle East?

It's dangerous, but it is their home. I would not say frightened. They live from day to day. One brother of our Order had just arrived in Baghdad from France and he said, "I have never been so happy in my life."

Why?

Because he gives himself. The only happiness is to give oneself.

And faith?

When you meet a young person, the question is not do they have faith, the question is what do they believe in? Everybody believes something. You have to start with the belief they have and then walk with them as they search. We hope that this will lead them to Christ.

As a priest do you find yourself useful?

Last night I had to go to Bristol as a man has cancer and is dying. I had dinner with him and his wife so we could talk, so he could face this cancer. Afterwards, I talked with a confused young man for an hour who searches for some meaning to his life. Now the next thing I have to do after this interview is go on a soup run, to visit the homeless, to feed them. I do not know whether I am useful! But the world is filled with people with whom I hope to share a small word of hope. But my life is not just helping people. I also have a wonderful life, a very happy life. Sometimes this joy is found with people who are in difficulties. I don't think you have real joy if you run away from suffering. Often I have the joy of friends, and great literature! I have the joy of nature in its profusion.

What do you think about possessions and money, the main preoccupation and ambition of the contemporary world?

We must not be enslaved by it. As a child I grew up in a family most people would consider wealthy. We had fourteen bedrooms in a big house. But my parents did not think that money was the important thing. My wealthy relatives living in stately homes were not happier. As a child I very quickly saw money does not make you happy. My friends thought I was mad, giving up a wealthy background to become a poor Dominican, but it was not because I wanted less, it was because I wanted more. If that makes sense.

As Master of the Order of Preachers, the worldwide Father General of the Dominican Order, you were a man of real power. You have gone from being a sort of a Pope to being a brother. How was that compared to now?

You only have power so as to empower other people. So, it could be a power over other people, but that would be an abuse. Your power is given to you to make them strong. If you use power to make people weak and to dominate them, you would be very unhappy. In the Dominican Order the highest authority is the General Chapter, the parliament of the Order. When I went to Rome I met a Cardinal who said, "You are the supreme authority in the Order." I said, "No, I am not. The brethren, the brothers, are the supreme authority."



Now I am just a brother, but then as Master I was also a brother and so the change is not so dramatic. My only obligation is to go to all the General Chapters until I die or go mad!

But you don't become someone like that unless you are gifted?

It was an election. The brothers interview you in a five day process, and then they vote.

Is the Order doing well?

One in six brothers are in formation, which is very high. So yes, the Order is doing well.

And will you stay in Oxford?

It is for the English Provincial and his Council to decide. I am happy here in this very lively community with wonderful young brothers. It's a beautiful city, with the stimulation of a great University, and only one hour from Heathrow!

Blackfriars, Oxford, June 2015

Official News

[A New Vice Prior Provincial for West Africa](#)

We are pleased to announce the confirmation and acceptance of the election of fr Benjamin Sombel SARR as the new Vice Prior Provincial of the Vice Province of St Augustine in West Africa.

Fr Sombel was born in 1967 in Fatick (Senegal). He made his first profession in 1996 and was ordained to the priesthood in 2001. He has a Doctorate in Dogmatic Theology (2006) and another in Philosophy (2015).

In recent years, fr Sombel has been serving at the Socius of the Vice Prior Provincial, Prior of the Convent of St Dominic in Abidjan and Professor and Secretary General of the Abidjan Campus of the Catholic University of West Africa.

Calendar of the Master of the Order for August 2015

July 28-August 11: Visitation to Mexico

12-13: Meeting at Avila, Spain

15-29: Summer Break

All articles are available on www.op.org