

Monialibus

*Nuns of the Order of Preachers
International Bulletin*



Nº 20 January 2009

*New Foundations
of
Dominican
Monasteries*



Cochabamba (Bolivia)



Kuito -Bie, (Angola)

*"See, I am doing a new deed,
even now it comes to light;
can you not see it?"*

(Is 43,19)

Summary:

• Letter of fr. Brian, op	5
• New Dominican Monastery in KUITO-BIE, Angola	7
• Foundation of a Dominican Monasteri in Bolivia	10
• New Association of Dominican Monasteries in U.S.A.....	12
• Retreat Preached by the Master of the Order, Fr. Carlos Azpiroz Costa, to the nuns of the Federation: Our Lady of the Preachers (France)	13
• Echoes of the ICNOP meeting.....	15
• Presentation of Sr Monica	17
• What Jubilees! What Years!	17
• Meeting of the Dominican Nuns from the monasteries of the ‘Europa region’	19
• Affectivity and Sexuality in the project of Dominican Consecrated life	23
• The challenge of holding both aspects (i.e. the hidden life and outreach to the world) in creative tension	24
• 2016- Jubilee of the foundation of the Order of Preachers	30
• The Second Joyful Mystery: The Visitation.....	31
• Open forum.....	35

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Letter of fr. Brian, OP

My Dear Sisters,

Beginning with the first Sunday of Advent, and extending throughout this whole year of 2009, the Master of the Order has invited the entire Dominican Family to reflect on the following Jubilee Theme: *"In the beginning was the Word: Dominic, Preacher of Grace."*

The Gospel of John begins with precisely these very same words, words that have their origin in the Book of Genesis, words that our ancestors have passed down from generation to generation in their attempt to say something about the grace-filled beginnings of our universe. The ancient story, which we know so well, begins this way: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Gen 1:1-3).

The 'dark abyss' mentioned in the Genesis text is a metaphor for that great, silent spaciousness within the heart of God. It is out of that eternal silence that God speaks. The divine Word, and in fact the entire universe, is born from the silence of God. As we heard during the celebration of the Christmas liturgy, in a text from the Book of Wisdom that Meister Eckhart loved so dearly, "For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful Word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land..." (18, 14-15).

The Word is born *in the beginning* from God's own heart. That Word is like our *Mother*, for it is she who gives us life. In the words of English Benedictine monk, Cyprian Smith:

"[The] Word is first uttered within the Trinity, as God the Son, in the eternal silence of heaven... No word, however eloquent it may seem, can have real depth, truth, or power to communicate, unless it arises from silence – unless it *expresses*, rather than obliterates that silence... The same principle is at work in the best music... If we can listen to the silence behind the wind stirring in the grass, behind the greatest music, and behind the deepest conversation which we have with others, then we have some notion, however faint, of the Supreme Word spoken by the Father out of the silent depths of the Abyss. All words are echoes of that Word."¹

Throughout his ministry, Jesus spoke words of life-giving compassion to the sick, the poor and the outcaste, words born from the Silent Abyss of the Father. Dominic, the preacher of grace, also spoke these kind of words to the poor of his time, for as Jordan of Saxony says, "God had given Dominic a special grace to weep for sinners and for the afflicted and oppressed; he bore their distress in the inmost shrine of his compassion..."²

To be a Dominican – brother or sister, lay or religious – means to be on fire with the preaching charism of St. Dominic. Like our Holy Father, we too are called to speak a word of hope and healing into the emptiness and brokenness of our world today. Sometimes we are called to speak that word to

¹ Cyprian Smith, OSB, *The Way of Paradox: Spiritual Life as Taught by Meister Eckhart*, (NY: Paulist Press, 1987), 58-60.

² Jordan of Saxony, OP, *Libellus de Principiis ordinis praedicatorum*, 12.

our sister or brother in community. This requires, though, that we be committed to listening daily to God's Word, like a disciple sitting at the feet of a master. The prophet Isaiah says, "The Lord has put the words in my mouth. Each morning the Lord awakens me and I am eager to learn his teaching" (Is 50:4). It is God's Word that teaches us how to speak, coming to us in moments of grace, but it is our task to prepare ourselves spiritually, to listen attentively, so as to receive the gift from God. Many of us do this through the practice of *Lectio Divina*.

The grace of preaching flows from our life of contemplation. You, my dear sisters, have much to teach us in this regard. I have heard our brother, Carlos, Master of the Order, say several times in the past months, recalling Dominic's admonition to the nuns sent from Prouilhe to the newly-formed Monastery of San Sisto in Rome, "Teach us the Order." Sisters, if we are to be an Order that preaches the grace of God, the gratuitous love of God, we need to learn the art of silence and contemplative prayer. Teach us to pray!

Last September, I had the wonderful opportunity of joining almost fifty nuns and a number of friars of Central and Eastern Europe in Strahfeld, Germany for the nuns' assembly. As part of the retreat that we shared at the beginning of the assembly, we spent a day of prayer at the German Concentration Camp of Dachau. It was a gray, drizzly day, and one could not help but feel the heaviness of history in every corner of that God-forsaken place. The silence of Dachau smells of death. But if you walk through a small gate in the wall at one end of the camp, you come into the chapel of a community of cloistered Carmelite nuns. Though the chapel itself is rather dark, the silence in the chapel is luminous; it is the silence of God's heart. It is the silence of the Lamb of God, his arms stretched out on the cross, embracing heaven and earth.

While wandering around the concentration camp, I suddenly found myself standing in the whitewashed gas chamber that the Nazi architects of evil had disguised as a shower. Along with the thousands of Jews, several thousand Catholic priests were also murdered in Dachau. Next to me, in the deafening silence of the gas chamber, stood Sister Josefa, a young nun from Prague, in the Czech Republic, a country that suffered many years under a communist regime. Many people came into the chamber, took a picture or two, and then moved on. One young man, who appeared to be Jewish, paused for a few moments of prayer. About all I could do was place my hands on the wall and just face the silence. The walls seemed to echo with cries of desperation. Sister Josefa and I looked at each other at one point; I think we both hoped that the other would say something to break the silence, but there was nothing to say. Somehow we knew that we just had to stand there and face it.

What word can one possibly speak from this kind of silence? How does a person share Good News in a world that is capable of such horror? Jesus' words from the gospel of that day came to my mind: "You will be given at that moment what you are to say. For it will not be you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you."

A preacher of grace is one who is called to stand in the places of silence and the darkness of faith and wait for God's Word to be born. Our whole Dominican life is lived in that crucible. If we run from the tension, we cannot be faithful to our calling, for it is right there that God's Word is given to us. To receive God's Word is grace, God's free gift. To speak that word is the mission of the preacher.

My dear sisters, as we begin this New Year dedicated to the Word of God (keeping in mind the recent Synod of Bishops on the Word of God), and as we reflect on St. Dominic, Preacher of Grace, let us be diligent at cultivating that very silence where the Father gives birth to the divine Word. There, in that great wellspring of Trinitarian grace, we are anointed anew with God's Spirit and reborn in the freedom of the children of God.

A little bit of News.

- The experience of participating in the Assembly of the U.S. and Canadian Association of Nuns and the Central-Eastern Europe Assembly of Nuns in September offered a wonderful glimpse into the life of the nuns in these two regions of the world. Thank you so much!
- At the end of October, the General Promoters of the Order spent several days meeting in the French Monastery of Dax. A time of true Dominican Family communion.
- In November I was also able to spend two days with the French-speaking region's prioresses and delegates at the Monastery of Notre-Dame de l'Assomption in Estavayer, Switzerland. Though my French is extremely limited, I truly enjoyed my time in this lovely monastery that will celebrate 700 years of unbroken Dominican contemplative presence in 1216.
- The next few months will take me to monasteries in Trinidad, Venezuela, Lima, Peru, Chile, Argentina and the new Monastery of "Santo Domingo de las Monjas" in Cochabamba, Bolivia.
- Later in the year I look forward to getting to know the nuns of Eastern Europe and Africa.

A Blessed and Grace-filled New Year to all!!

Your brother in St. Dominic,
fr Brian Pierce, OP

Original: English

New Dominican Monastery in KUITO-BIE, Angola

When the Lord delivered Sion from bondage,
It seemed like a dream,
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
On our lips there were songs" psalm125

We make ours the feelings of the psalmist expressing the joy that overflows our hearts for living such a great event in the history of our community for the inauguration of the Monastery "Mae de Deus" (Mother of God) in Kuito. It has been like a child cared and caressed by everybody. After a long itinerary under the providential hand of God, today we sing hymns of thanksgiving because He has carried through to a happy end all the efforts to realize this new house of prayer in African land.

This is the ninth Dominican Monastery in Africa and it is the forty second of our Federation of St. Dominic, Spain, and the tenth of the Fraternal Union "Mother of God" We would like to share some details about the development of the foundation, from the beginning till the canonical erection.

In 1996 the bishop José Nambi asked the Monastery of Benguela, Angola, a foundation of contemplative nuns for his diocese. After making the necessary contacts, the war did not permit that this wish was carried out not until the year 2004. That zone of Huambo and Kuito-Bié was the centre of warlike attacks which destroyed these two cities and it was the cause of innumerable deaths. The bishop wished that the Monastery would be like a flag of peace and reconciliation in that area.

In the year 2004, when the founder community "Mae de Deus" from Benguela, the bishops, the Federation, the Master of the Order and the Congregation for Religious life had made all the procedures,

10 solemn professed nuns left from the Community of Benguela to Kuito-Bié. The group of nuns was formed by two Spanish (founders of the Monastery of Benguela), seven nuns from Angola and a Portuguese.

The sisters settled down in Kuito, in a rent house, to watch over the building works of the new monastery. The new monastery is 4 km. far from the town, in an area called Kunje, a small village with a lot of poor houses. The sisters were living in this little house of Kuito for four years, they accepted all kind of difficulties such as: the lacking of water or electricity, apart from the different difficulties of each day.

But they used to say: "we have nothing but happiness".

The community of Benguela, the founder, helped them in everything despite the big distance between Kuito and Benguela which is more than 400 km. The road is not accessible as all were destroyed because of the war, but both monasteries were in permanent contact.

The Fraternal Union "Mother of God", not only approved the foundation of the new monastery with joy but also they supported morally and materially in everything they could, especially the monastery of Olmedo, as it was the nearby monastery and the one with more foundations experiences. When the sisters arrived in Kuito, in 2004, the town was completely destroyed; there were only a few inhabitants.

That zone has got a lot of benefits with the reconstruction Project of the Government. At the moment a big number of houses and new and nice buildings can be seen, this zone has been especially repopulated by young people and children.

Many religious Congregations have reopened their houses and schools and others are settling down.

For the reconstruction of the Monastery in Kuito we received help from different parts of the Church (from the Holy Father John Paul II), from the Order, the Federation of St. Dominic, the Ministry of works of Angola and a lot of benefactors and friends of the community. The missionary communities of Angola helped with the project.

At the beginning the construction of the new building was a bit difficult which made us change the building constructor company. The new building constructor, Sr. Alberto Pederneira, guided and supported by father Francisco Coelho, op, of Portugal, finished the work in nine months. Sr. Pederneira used to say once and again "the dream of my life was always to build, with great care, a decent house where the nuns could praise God in peace". The building hasn't been finished yet, solid walls and a few things more have to be made. We are waiting for some economic help to finish the project.

The sisters moved to the new building on the 5th of June 2008. They were happy because this was like entering into the Promised Land. In all we were eighteen, with the Vicar Mother, her companion and five sisters from Bengala.

Two days later, on the 7th Saturday, the canonical erection was realized. It was an unforgettable day. We woke up in an atmosphere of feast. At nine in the morning people were gathered together in front of the main door dancing and singing. Many people attended: Bishops, a great number of priests, the Dominican Family represented by the Vicar Fr. Mario Ruig, op, friars, Dominican sisters of the Rosary and of St. Catherine, Dominican laity, religious from different Congregations and from different parts of Angola and a lot of faithful from Kuito, Benguela, Luanda and Kunje.

In all one thousand people whose presence showed what importance it was for them of the presence of a new Monastery dedicated to prayer.

The Bishop, Sr. José Nambi, before he cut the ribbon put in the entrance, explained the meaning of the blessing rite that he was going to do. The building contractor also manifested his joy for having made this work at the service of the Church. We went through all the rooms for their respective blessings and after this, in the patio of the entrance, a solemn Eucharist was celebrated which was presided by Sr.

Oscar Braga, emeritus Bishop of Benguela. It was concelebrated by Sr. José Nambi, Bishop of Kuito, (son of the dioceses of Benguela), the emeritus Bishop of Kuito and a big number of priests who were native of Benguela Kuito and Huambo in the Eucharist. In the homily, Sr. Oscar who appreciated contemplative life, emphasized our mission in the Church and in the society: "The nuns are the headquarters of faith in the Diocese... through silence and prayer, with their lives offered to God in the cloister they mysteriously give life to the Church and humanity... they are like salty stones which are thrown to the fire and they become fire..."

The Eucharist started at 9:30 a.m. and finished at 13:00, all the participants were very pleased. The master of ceremony was in charge of the liturgy and he explained the most important moments, the songs to the sound of the rumpus and the clapping enlivened and cheered up the celebration. The documents of the canonical erection were read and at the end a sister, on behalf of the founders, expressed their gratitude to the people present and to everybody who collaborated in the construction of the Monastery.

Everybody was invited to have lunch. For the missionaries it was a good opportunity for meeting and having a fraternal dialogue. Truly "God was creating something new"

At 17:00 we made use of the choir for the first time for Vespers and this was the official closing of the enclosure. It was a moving moment for all the assistants and for the nuns who were dancing and embracing each other happily in their new nest. At the end the Bishop gave out to them some copies of "Verbi Sponsa" that the Papal Nuncio in Angola had given to him at the request of the Mother Prioress.

It was significant that this event coincided with the visit of the Vicar of the Mother Federal, Mother Mary of the Church Aristegui, of the Fraternal Union to the communities of Benguela and Kuito, Mother Mary of the Church Aristegui. Her presence and spiritual encouragement were an incentive in that summit moment for us who were the founders and for the sisters that began a new life. We are grateful for the message that the Mother Federal, M^a Luz Franco, sent. The Mother Vicar came accompanied by Sr. Maria of Fátima Da Costa who is from Angola native of Kamacupa (near Kuito); she belongs to the community of Santorin. That is the reason why the choral group sang a song which said: "Spain, Angola and Greece form a family in God"

It was a festive celebration and a joyful and important event for the Church in Angola. The news was on the national radio and TV.

The Master of the Order, Carlos Azpiroz, op, encouraged us from the beginning and thanks to his intervention we could get the canonical erection of the monastery in the established date. He addressed a cordial letter of felicitation to the founders with the appointment of Mother M^a José Martín as the first Prioress, with the blessing of St. Dominic for all the sisters.

The ten founders are very happy and brave with the new mission. They wish to implant Dominican contemplative life with evangelical authenticity and radicalism to be the presence of Jesus in Kunge. Now little by little we must establish all the observances and finish the building. The sisters have to work baking cakes and they have a lot of customers. There are seven young girls who want to be nuns. They often visit the monastery and when they finish their studies they will enter as aspirants.

We are very grateful to God and we ask you to help us to beg Him that His grace which inspired this work goes on supporting it and to carrying it to a happy conclusion with fruits of holiness.

May our Father St Dominic bless us all so that we could live with fidelity our contemplative vocation throughout the world.

Monastery "Mae de Deus"
Benguela, Angola
Original: Spanish

Foundation of a Dominican Monastery in Bolivia

We, the nuns of the Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary of Peru are very grateful to God for His infinite mercy to us because we, mere servants of His, are contributing to the growth of the Kingdom of God through a new house of prayer in Bolivia.

This is the first Dominican monastery in this South American country; thanks to Fr. Carlos Azpiroz, OP, Master of the Order, who had the great idea of commending to our Federation this foundation project to complete the Dominican Family in Bolivia.

It is a great joy for us to have a new house in this brother country and thus little by little the Kingdom of God is growing with our prayer and contemplation.

We are very grateful for your prayers, for the unconditional support of the communities of our Federation and for the generosity of the Sisters who have accepted the call of God to this house.

The Sisters who form the community are from three different communities. We are sure that with the effort and the love of each one of them it will become a reality to live in oneness of mind and heart.

Nowadays our Federation needs vocations but from the limited situation of each community we want to collaborate in this mission in Bolivian lands.

The Bolivian Vicar received our Sisters eagerly and we are sure that our Sisters will create new bonds of unity in the Dominican Family in Bolivia.

Cochabamba, the area destined for this foundation, is regarded as the Vatican of Bolivia because of the great number of different religious communities that exist in it.

This foundation started last November and the Sisters are living in the house that the friars provided for them provisionally. We hope that soon we will see the monastery built. We know that this work comes from God and we have faith that with the support and generosity of the whole Dominican Family we will be able to get the land to build the monastery. We beg all the nuns around the world to pray for this project to be realized in a short time. May this tabernacle which is beginning in Bolivia be a place where grace and peace will reign.

Thank you, Master of the Order, for your support in this work of God.

The arrival of the sisters

Our founding Sisters arrived on 21st November at 7:30 a.m. They spent the night at the airport of Santa Cruz waiting for the flight to Cochabamba. On this historic journey they were accompanied by the federation assistant: Juan José Salaverry.

All the Dominican friars of the two formation houses and the federal Council of the Nuns were waiting to meet us at Cochabamba airport.

We enjoyed watching our brothers, the friars, with their white habits waiting to see the plane in which our Sisters were travelling.

Each one of the friars gave to each one of the sisters a beautiful traditional hat from the town of Cochabamba, and the M. Federal gave them flowers and a little ornament. The Sisters were so excited that they forgot to pick up the luggage. When the assistant, fr. Juan José, realized this, he made them come back to collect the luggage. Our father assistant was the last one to leave with a big amount of suitcases and luggage.

Nevertheless, the nuns could forget everything except their Spouse, which is why Sr. María Soledad, despite her short height, was carrying a wrapped cross but we could see a beautiful Crucifix.

This sacred statue accompanied the Sisters during the journey and it will point the way of renunciation for each contemplative nun.

As our father St. Dominic used to meditate and intercede at the foot of the cross, his nuns will do the same here in Cochabamba. Mother Julia carried a statue of the Infant God; this is a nice sign of the birth of this new house in Bolivia.

The friars kindly took the founding Sisters round through the centre of the town. When they finally arrived at the house, we were waiting for them with a statue of our father St. Dominic, a statue of the Virgin Mary and the holy-water stoup. Then we went through all the rooms in procession and singing the Salve. Each founding Sister was carrying a lit candle as a sign of her consecrated life at the foot of the Tabernacle. Each one of the Sisters received her blessing and was taken to her cell, place of encounter and loneliness with the Lord. The Sisters' cells were close to the choir, place of praise and intercession for the whole world and especially for the beloved country of Bolivia.

After blessing all the rooms of the house, in the afternoon we had Mass. Our brothers, the friars, attended the Mass.

Our assistant, fr. Juan José, presided at the Eucharist and four Bolivian friars concelebrated. The chapel was small but filled with gratitude, delight and amazement before the revealed Word and our Family gathered together in Bolivia.

When Mass was ended, the letter of greeting from the Master of the Order and his Socius for Latin America, Javier Pose, was read.

Finally we shared a fraternal dinner and a toast of honour and hearty welcome to our beloved Sisters.

Solemn inauguration

On the 23rd of November the Solemn inauguration of the house was celebrated in one of the houses of the friars called "St. Martin of Porres".

A procession was organized and some students came to our house to show us the way to the procession ground. The procession ground was in St. Mary's Square from which we started the procession. At the front of the procession were the heralds of the Gospel in their uniform and they were carrying little flags with the emblem of Heart of the Virgin Mary on them. They were playing and singing Marian songs during the procession until we reached the celebration area.

When we reached the House of St. Martin of Porres, we were received by a musical band which was playing melodious songs to proclaim that we were celebrating a feast. The whole Dominican Family and other faithful were gathered together.

During the Mass, the Gospel passage was acted by the Parish theatre group. They acted well and so helped us to reflect on the revealed Word in this great solemnity of Christ the King.

After the homily, the dancing group presented us with sacred dances in the Jewish style and with typical Jewish clothes. The central idea of the dance was the KINGDOM OF CHRIST.

The offertory was another moment of reflection and meditation.

A handful of sand and a few stones were offered as symbols of the new mission that our Sisters and the Order were beginning in Bolivia. It was a sign of the strength and courage necessary for this mission. A candle was also offered and a Bible as signs of life and the dedication of each life which is offered to God.

A beautiful sign for the beginning of our foundation was a box of cutlery: the "FAMOUS WOODEN SPOONS" that our father St. Dominic used to give as a present to his nuns.

After living and celebrating the Word and sharing in the Eucharistic table, the final blessing was given; each one of the founders was introduced to the faithful and to the community of the brothers. They were welcomed with applause and were wished happiness, and joy in their mission and the flourishing of holy vocations in these Bolivian lands.

Original: Spanish

New Association of Dominican Monasteries in U.S.A.

An historical first for the new Association of Monasteries of Nuns of the Order of Preachers in the United States of America was the opening of their General Assembly held during September 2008 at the motherhouse of the Springfield Dominican Sisters in Springfield, IL.

Preparations for this first assembly were approximately four years in the making and with a wider perspective; this first Assembly was over three decades in the making, since the nuns began their first organized collaborative effort by forming the Conference of Dominican Nuns of the USA in 1975.

The opening day began with a glorious Mass for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on our Assembly. This was offered by Archbishop Thomas Cajetan Kelly, OP from Louisville KY and also

concelebrating were Fr. Dominic Izzo, OP, Friar Consultant for the Association, Fr. Brian Pierce, OP, Promoter for the Nuns and Fr. Peter Witchousky, OP Chaplain for the Springfield Congregation. The entire community of Springfield sisters provided the liturgical music and vocal accompaniments.

Our new canonical status, now recognized by the Church and enjoying the support of the Master of the Order, Fr. Carlos Azpiroz Costa, OP, provides new opportunities to strengthen and promote more effectively our Dominican contemplative life, so as to be more truly and fully in the heart of the Church and in the heart of the Holy Preaching. As Fr. Carlos has exhorted us A(we) gather not simply to shore up the past but to allow the authentic tradition of the past to strengthen us as (we) move into the future, a future together.

The General Assembly, focused on the theme: A Liturgy, the Heart of Our Life, brought together the prioresses, delegates and observers from ten member and affiliate monasteries, which span the distance from western Canada to the island of Trinidad.

In the course of the assembly we finalized our A Directory which compliments our previously approved Statutes, and elected a leadership team of president and council for a new four year term. Sister Mary John from the Monastery of the Infant Jesus in Lufkin TX , president; Sister Miriam from Monastery of Mary the Queen, Elmira, NY, vice president; Sister Mary of the Sacred Heart from Corpus Christi Monastery, Menlo Park, CA; Sister Mary Catharine from Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, Summit, NJ and Sister Mary Thomas of Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament, Farmington Hills, MI will serve as councillors. Fr. Dominic Izzo, OP was proposed as our Religious Assistant and this petition has now been confirmed by the Holy See.



Three new standing committees were defined: Formation, Communications and Healthcare. The Formation committee will provide resources for the monasteries on various topics designed to assist

the nuns with new-member issues, theological formation and ongoing study. The Communications committee will oversee the publication of two periodicals: Association Sharings, which is an exchange of thoughts and ideas between the monasteries, and DMS (Dominican Monastic Studies) a theological journal that is authored by nuns from various monasteries. An innovative Healthcare committee was established to primarily address the ethical and sensitive issues facing healthcare and aging of religious today.

Three dimensions of liturgy were focused upon during our days together. Fr. David Wright, OP provided an overview of the history of the liturgy and specifically our Dominican liturgy; Sister Kathleen Harmon, SNDdeN, Ph.D explored liturgy as expressions of *kenosis* and *theosis* in our lives and Fr. Brian Pierce, OP invited us to let the Liturgy of the Word dwell more abundantly within our monasteries in a renewed silence and stillness, particularly in our liturgical prayer.

Sharing in our days together was our International Representative, Sister Mary Lucy, OP from Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, Buffalo, NY who gave us a report on the activities of the International Commission. Fr. Brian Pierce, OP facilitated a discussion among the nuns on the thoughts of the Master concerning Dominican contemplative life. Sister Mary Dominica Brennan, OP from the Springfield Dominican Sisters expertly guided us through various canonical questions from the nuns. Altogether it was an exciting time that was a true witness to the beauty of Dominican government at work, open dialogue, and a communion of diverse backgrounds and personalities. Our unity in diversity, our loving concern and trust, made us all one in Christ and allowed us to plunge deeply into the wide and refreshing waters of unanimity and trust.

Original: English

Retreat Preached by the Master of the Order, Fr. Carlos Azpiroz Costa, to the nuns of the Federation: Our Lady of the Preachers (France)



On September 21, 2008, the thirteen members of the Chalais community (near Grenoble, France) were joined by thirty-four other nuns, for a retreat preached by the Master of the Order. All the monasteries of Our-Lady-of-Preachers Federation in France, Norway, and Switzerland, were represented by at least one sister.

The retreat began during Compline. Its orientation became clear the next morning. (The advice Brother Carlos had already given us, twice, was to eat well and to rest.) He said that he would not make the time with us an act of government but rather an intimate meeting with his sisters for the sole reason of speaking about God. The title of the retreat was the psalm-verse "I run in the way of your commandments for you have widened my heart" (119, 32). Our brother wanted to "give us oxygen." We are all witnesses and beneficiaries of the fact that he did this masterfully! He asked us in turn to form our brothers, as has been our mission from the beginning of the Order.

Brother Carlos gave two conferences daily, of about an hour in length. Witnesses accompanied us along our "pilgrimage," each one of them helping us to remember, to celebrate and purify our memories, to ask pardon, and to make decisions. We walked with seven Old Testament and eight New

Testament witnesses. As his conclusion to the retreat, Brother Carlos reviewed the main themes of each meditation and spoke of Mary, the queen of all creation.

Here is the detailed plan of the conferences:

- Abraham: God sees, foresees, and provides.
- Joseph: dreams which take place on earth and reveal the dreams of God.
- Moses: someone knows me and calls me by my name; Moses, a man in solidarity with his people.
- David: a heart-breaking love for his son
- Elijah and the light breeze
- Ruth and forgetfulness of self in abnegation
- Jonás and mercy
- John the Baptist: He increases and I diminish...(Do what he tells you!)
- The Samaritan woman and thirsting for God
- Thomas: blessed are those who have believed
- Peter: on the word of Jesus, we will cast out the nets again
- Paul and the preaching of salvation
- John, the beloved disciple, at the foot of the Cross.

The richness of these meetings is difficult to convey. Each one of us, and the two brothers who came to share the retreat (Jean-Pierre Arfeuill and Philippe Toxé), were touched by the depth of the meditations and by the attentive presence – so fraternal – of Brother Carlos. The humour which the preacher used easily, helped us to hear/understand the challenging, exact, and dynamic words. During the meditation on St. John Baptist, we were invited to remember or become aware of our motto, and to notice that there is a price to pay for having a motto. The Precursor had two: “A man can receive nothing if it is not given him from heaven” (Jn 3:27) and “He must increase and I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). A few days later we received a holy picture with Br. Carlos’s personal blessing on the back of it and an empty space for writing our motto.

Besides the Eucharistic celebrations, two exceptional events gave this retreat its special tonality. On the Friday of the Retreat, two sisters read the prayer for forgiveness composed by John Paul II for the Jubilee Year 2000, and then we venerated the cross set out in front of the altar. Each sister could thus, by a gesture suitable for her, express her repentance to the Lord. Three days later, our intercessions at Vespers took on a special form. Each of us was invited to express aloud before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, a prayer inspired by her motto --- in the spirit of a Magnificat, The Lord has done marvels for me, and in the spirit of a Fiat, Be it done to me according to your word. Privacy was respected during this event because two sisters read aloud from the Gospel of John or others sang.

We thank the Lord for this time of many blessings! We thank Brother Carlos for every precious moment shared around the Word of God, around the Lord. We thank our sisters of Chalais for the warmth of their welcome and for the work each one did so that the retreat would take place in the best conditions possible, which was indeed the case! We thank each of the sisters of our communities for having allowed us to experience this outstanding event!

Sr. Anne-Catherine, op
Monastery at Orbey, France
Original: French

Echoes of the ICNOP meeting

"How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers live in unity!" (Psalm 132)

With hope and eagerness, from different parts of the world, the Sisters of the ICN [International Commission of the Nuns], called together by the Promoter of the nuns, fr. Brian Pierce, O.P., arrived in Santa Sabina for the annual meeting which was celebrated from 28th of November till 6th of December. We closed the liturgical year and opened the new one. As you know, some of the Sisters took part in the commission for the first time. We received a hearty welcome from the Sisters who were already on the commission and so were soon ready to start our sessions with fraternity.

In one of the sessions, each nun gave a report about her federation or region; we also shared together our dreams, hopes and worries for our different monasteries. One of our concerns was the lack of vocations, especially in Europe where, after much prayer and discernment, some of the monasteries are merging with others, while in some cases, the nuns have decided to suppress their monasteries in order to make new foundations. The Sisters are living all these events in a spirit of abandonment in God's hands. A sister used to say: "Yesterday we were in autumn and today we live our winter...with love and total abandonment, with joy and happiness". On the other hand, we could see the initiative of some communities to share on-going formation with lay people, without detriment to the enclosure. We enjoyed hearing the news of new foundations in other places.

One day we had a meeting with the Master of the Order, Fr. Carlos Azpiroz, O.P. He was very kind and shared with us some aspects about the Synod of the Word. Firstly he explained how a Synod is conducted, and then he told us the part that he himself had played in the Synod. We all know that what he had to say was very good. We thank God for the gift of our brother Carlos.

Those who were in charge of the liturgy told us the good news that the Ritual for the Anointing of the Sick and the one for Funeral Rites have been published, but they are in Latin. Each Province is responsible for translating these books into their native language.

It was nice for us to share our opinions and experiences; each day we learnt something new. We were asked a question: "What did we think about the canonical visitation? To understand this topic better, the presence of Fr. Edward Ruane, O.P., Vicar of the Master, was a great help to us. He explained the theology of the visitation to us. He told us that Abraham was visited by God and was given a promise and Moses was also visited by God to lead his people out of slavery. God visits His people through the prophet who gives them hopeful news; Mary was visited by the Angel who was sent by God... We can see throughout the Scriptures that God's visitations are meant to give us hope, liberation and good news. Perhaps some of our communities have had visitations that left bad impressions due to some misuse of authority; we must not let such experiences discourage us but rather think in terms of fraternal visitations which can help us to see things from another point of view, a look from a different perspective can help us to find the solution to our problems, to improve and to foster our projects. Fr. Edward told us that a lot of communities feared of these fraternal visitations; however, after having had them, they realized that they had been very positive and nowadays they ask for them readily

To request a fraternal visitation the following requirements should be taken into account:

- The community has to decide that they want to have a fraternal visitation and they have to propose three names, they can be friars, Sisters or nuns.

- The Prioress must write to the Master of the Order to ask for the visitation. She must communicate to him the three names chosen by the community and he, in turn, must designate one of the three for the visitation. This is a good opportunity for the growth of our communities.

Any community wanting to request a fraternal visitation should contact the representative of their federation or region for further information. May this visitation be a visit of God for the ones who need it.

The coordinator of the D.S.I. shared with us the dreams they have regarding to the nuns. One of their dreams is to share together the Word and Lectio because the Spirit of the Lord is over all. This should be organized in our monasteries in conjunction with the nearest communities of Sisters. It was requested that this should be something that is established on a regular basis and not as something temporal. Another of their dreams designed to form a bond was that they would like to buy the products made by the nuns instead of getting them in other places; they would also like to share formation courses with the nuns. The Sister asked us if we agreed with their dreams; all of us answered that their dreams were our dreams too. And you, Sister, who are reading these lines, what do you say...?

The Sister who is in charge of the Dominican Volunteers informed us about how this task is being carried out. There has to be a community that sends and another community that receives. They encouraged us to take part in this sending in order to promote this vocation in people with a missionary Spirit who come often to our communities. These people are sent to missionary places and they are received by a Dominican community. To take part in the Dominican Volunteers, these people should be available for at least for a year.

We, the nuns, already have our webpage. To complete this webpage we have to fill in a form with our personal data. Later you will receive further information about this in your communities.

To end, I would like to remind you that we are in the novena of years which will end in the Jubilee year 2016, when it will be 800 years since the approval of the Order of Preachers. A general topic has been chosen: "Woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel" and for each year there will be a topic which will be related to the general topic.

The ICN wish all the nuns to be involved in our meeting and that is why we would like each community to send to its representative their experience of Lectio Divina and study. We are sure that this sharing will help us a lot and will suggest to us more ideas in order to give more life to our communities.

I do not want to finish these lines without saying thank you to the friars of Santa Sabina for the fraternal welcome they showed to us. They did their best to make us feel at home. Thank you, brothers, for your simplicity, humility and availability, we really felt at home.

We are very grateful to the Prior of Sopra Minerva, to the friars of the community of Saint Catherine of Siena who explained to us everything about our sister St. Catherine of Siena. Our gratitude also goes to the community of nuns at Monte Mario with whom we had Vespers, Compline and, of course, a meal. We spent unforgettable and very nice moments. May God bless you all, brothers and sisters, for your kindness.

Sor Rosa Luz Manrique,op

Original: Spanish

Presentation of Sr Monica

Sr. Monica Nzilani Mutua, OP (Corpus Christi, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya)



I was born in 1950 and joined the Monastery in 1971. I made my First Profession in 1974 and in 1977 I made my Solemn Profession.

I got to know about the Contemplative Life purely by chance. Until then I knew only about the active Life. But when someone told me about the Contemplative Life, I felt that was what I wanted to do with my life. The information I got was not much more than that it was a life of Silence and Prayer; praying to God for others and for myself. When I joined the Monastery I learnt more about the Life and was happy with what I heard. I still am learning as together with my sisters here we join all of you and continue to Praise to Bless and to Preach the Word in our Life of Prayer.

In the Community I have worked as a Subprioress several terms, worked as a Novice Mistress for two terms, been Bursar for many years and other jobs especially Garden Work which I love very much. Quite a challenge to learn to give a humble service to one another.

My appointment as a member of the International Commission came as a total surprise to me. It was not easy for me to say Yes but with encouragement from others I decided to give in and I am happy to be able to work in this capacity knowing that I can depend on the prayers of all of you my dear Sisters since it is the Lord's work not ours.

Original: English

What Jubilees! What Years!

We would like to share with you a little about our year in honor of the 150th. Anniversary of the Lourdes apparitions of Our Lady.

For us at the Dominican Monastery, this great Jubilee opened on Dec. 8, 2007, while we were still celebrating the 800 years since the founding of Dominican nuns by St. Dominic. What a wonderful combination! But our own Sr. Mary of the Sacred Heart had the last word in jubilees. She told us that with the golden anniversary of her profession on Feb. 11, feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, she was making three in one. What could be better! (The Lourdes year ends on Dec. 8, 2008.)

Our bishop, Jacques Perrier, launched twelve missions for the jubilee year. The diocese, and the pilgrimages, were to actualize a given theme. The one entrusted to religious communities was entitled *the Church on the mission of calling to conversion*. We were especially concerned with the penitence aspect of the message of Lourdes, the call of Mary resounding in the life of Bernadette Soubirous: "pray for sinners" –in which we hear the voice of St. Dominic also.

Lent was a good time to try to encourage some people to share our prayer and a little of our experience. And some sisters let us know that the year was a penitential one for them because of physical or interior difficulties. That has been our mission, the help asked for by Mary: that we each share in the sufferings of her Son on behalf of so many anguished hearts, eager for light and love. Many marvels are worked at Lourdes, as priests know. The year demanded of them great availability. At the

monastery we met many priests, among them our Dominican brothers, who came to spend a Jubilee day or two. Among the twelve Jubilee missions, we should mention those for the sick, for peace, for fostering devotion to the Eucharist, for the role of the Church among all nations. .

The Jubilee route across town which was proposed to pilgrims by the Bishop was the following: from the parish church where each could renew his/her baptismal grace by visiting the spot where Bernadette was baptized, then to the hut where the Soubirous family was living in misery at the time of the apparitions. The third pilgrim stop was the Grotto, near the Saint Michel gate, and the fourth, the Hospice where Bernadette made her first Holy Communion on June 3, 1858, at the age of fourteen. A blessed memory for her, so happy was she both to see Mary at the grotto and to receive Jesus as she had wanted for so long to do, according to her own testimony.

At the monastery too a Jubilee route was prepared by four groups of sisters, and using places likely to evoke the meaning of each stage: in the choir, near an old country road, on the second-floor terrace facing the grotto, and an oratory. At every stop, the songs or words chosen gave an ambiance for the special grace of the place. How extraordinary it has been – and still is: thousands of pilgrims, their badges around their necks, walking from one place to another in the town, in an endless stream, bearing witness in all simplicity to their faith! An astonishing sight for the whole town which usually sees little of the pilgrims who are massed around the grotto and the sanctuaries, but not in the town!

There was also a Youth Movement (JMJ) pilgrimage from Sydney. We were represented there by a young girl who was preparing to enter our community a few days later. From the monastery, where everything resounds when there is an east wind, we heard the echoes of the group's songs and celebration.

The Great Jubilee Pilgrimage, instituted and filled with spiritual favours by Pope Benedict XVI, occurred in September. Some of us could follow the ceremonies in the sanctuaries and see the Pope at close range, and KTO television had made it possible for us to do from the time of his arrival in Paris.

We were privileged that in Lourdes the Holy Father stayed with our nearest neighbors, the Ladies of the Auxilium, whose fields adjoin our own . From our second-floor windows facing east, we could see his plane landing at the Rugby Stadium after coming from the airport at Pau. And a photo showed him starting down "Bishops' Avenue" which we know very well and can see from our windows. At the Dames de l'Áuxilium house, the Holy Father's rooms were on the side where there is a small woods, near our sheep-pasture. The shepherdess who tends our young lambs was very happy at that; another was very moved by the silence of the crowds in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. These details seem to accord with the grace of this Pope -- a gentle, benevolent, humble man.

To leave our hearts open to prayer and to the contemplation of Mary, we conclude with a poem evoked by the tympanum of the Rosary Church, where Mary is depicted as giving the Rosary to St. Dominic. For the Pilgrimage, its director, Philippe Jeannin, restored to Mary the branch of three golden *fleurs de lys* which she formerly held in her hand.

O Virgin Mary, in this jubilee year

We have offered you the scepter of your kingdom, adorned with three *fleurs de lys*.

We ask you, O our Queen, to perfume our hearts with love, sweetness, and mercy.

Take us, one and all, under your tender protection.

That is our prayer for all the nuns, for the whole Order, for all your children.

Monasteri of Lourdes

Original: French

*Meeting of the Dominican Nuns from the monasteries
of the 'Europa region'*

Perhaps it is important to say at the outset that this meeting could not have taken place without the support and generosity of our brothers and sisters in the Order and a number of very generous benefactors. 'Renovabis' - the solidarity fund of the German Catholics for Middle and Eastern Europe - responded with a very generous donation as did our Dominican Brothers in whose regions our monasteries are located and other generous benefactors. This helped to cover costs of accommodation and simultaneous translation etc.

The meeting was conducted in the three most common languages of our region: English, Polish and German. We are very grateful to those Dominican brothers and sisters who offered their services as translators free of charge during this meeting. Another brother, with a lot of patience and diligence, created the website free of charge.

The Missionary Dominican Sisters of Strahlfeld, where the meeting was held, were most helpful and cooperative in all the organisational needs and wishes and hosted us at a minimum cost.

A short history

The situation in this "Europa Region" is quite different from that in Italy, France and Spain where there are federations of monasteries and a common language. With monasteries located in Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Norway, Lithuania, Poland, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands there is much cultural, social and political diversity. However language is the greatest challenge when trying to foster communication among our communities.



Since 1990 there has been an annual meeting for the Prioresses and delegates of the German speaking monasteries to discuss questions and problems facing the communities and common ongoing formation. From 1995 similar meetings have taken place among the monasteries of Eastern and Central Europe. Some Eastern European sisters were invited to the German meetings while some German speaking sisters as well as sisters from Oslo and Drogheda attended the Eastern European meetings.

It was out of this background and experience that the notion of a common meeting of Prioresses (and delegates) from each community of the "Europa Region" was born - the first being at Prague in 2005 and was a huge success. (See Monialibus No.13). At the end of that meeting a second European gathering to be held in Germany in 2008 was agreed upon and a steering committee was formed to begin preparations for the same.

When Fr Carlos was on visitation in Germany some nuns asked him if he would preach a retreat to us similar to the retreats which he has preached in other regions and he agreed. A letter circulated to

the communities met with much enthusiasm but the majority of the nuns indicated that they would like to combine this retreat with some days of discussion and sharing.

So in February of 2007 the planning team got together in the monastery in Lage-Rieste in Germany. The "Haus der Begegnung" of the Missionary Dominican Sisters in Strahlfeld was chosen as the venue. The theme of the meeting was agreed: "A city built on a hill cannot be hidden - The hidden

life of the nuns and their outreach to the world". We would have 5 days silent retreat followed by 3 days of discussion and sharing. It was hoped that Fr Carlos could join us also for some of this. However following the sudden death of Fr Dominique Renaud RIP it was necessary for Fr Carlos to cancel this retreat. As we already had done much of the preparation it was not possible for us to change the dates without causing a lot of inconvenience. So we decided to forge ahead and ask Fr Brian Pierce OP to preach the retreat – we did not know then that he would succeed Fr Manuel Merten as promoter of the nuns! Fr Manuel agreed to act as moderator.

The meeting at Strahlfeld

A detailed account of the meeting can be found on the website www.euromon-op-2008.de – therefore here I will confine myself to some main highlights which hopefully will allow you to glimpse a little of the richness we experienced during these days together. 45 nuns from 14 monasteries participated. In addition there were 6 translators (5 brothers and 1 sister), Br Ralf Sagner OP (webmaster) and Fr Gerfried Bramiage OP and Fr Richard Kliem OP both from the Province of Teutonia joined us for the last three days.

On Saturday the 20th all had come from east and west to meet at Strahlfeld situated in the beautiful Bavarian countryside. Throughout the meeting the sisters of Strahlfeld allowed us to use their beautiful chapel for the celebration of the liturgy and Eucharistic Adoration. Our day revolved around Lauds, Eucharist and Vespers. Each day a different language group was responsible for the liturgy which was prepared and celebrated with great care.



On Sunday morning (September 21st) after Mass we gathered in the conference room which was decked with the flags of all the nationalities present. Fr. Manuel – who, although still enjoying his sabbatical, acted as facilitator - declared that this day was to be spent playing games in order to become acquainted with each other, and that the translators would join in since nobody is supposed to work on Sunday! Although most of the participants – sisters and brothers - had never met before, a wonderful harmony and sense of togetherness prevailed and resounded once more in prayerfulness at the end of the day with sung Vespers.

During the following three days – Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday – Fr Brian preached each morning and afternoon while the remainder of the time was free for prayer, reading and reflection. An atmosphere of silence prevailed although we agreed that sisters could meet to talk if they so wished. Many sisters enjoyed the countryside around Strahlfeld which was ideal for long walks. The priests were available for any sister who wished to speak to them.

Fr Brian's preaching gave us much food for thought and reflection on our role as nuns in the Order of Preachers – listening to the word, celebrating it and putting it into practice. It is not possible to give an adequate account of it within the limits of this report but I would like to highlight two practical points which impressed us:

1. The importance of contemplative silence. He asked "what if we were to ease into our communal prayer with periods of silence?" Then he told us of his experience with a group of itinerant preachers where Lauds and Vespers began each day with ten minutes communal silence. This ten minutes silence was not optional personal prayer time but an essential element to the

community's prayer. And what a difference ten minutes makes to the quality of the prayer. He asked "might a practice like this not help us to discover a new simplicity and beauty in our liturgy? Might we not hear the Word with a new freshness? Might we not become even more powerfully the 'Holy Preaching that Dominic so yearned for in the early communities? Is it not worth a try?

2. Listening to the Word: I shall quote from Fr Brian's notes: "We are called to cultivate interior silence with the same diligence with which a good gardener cultivates and nurtures her garden. But we have an even more urgent need to cultivate this garden of receptivity to God's Word communally. Is this not the challenge of our living together as a *holy preaching*?" He continued: "Allow me to imagine what a communal pilgrimage with the Word might look like in a monastery. I think the community could begin by pausing and coming together, perhaps sometime after breakfast on Monday morning, to simply hear the gospel of the following Sunday proclaimed once or twice, and in this way allow the seed to be sown into the fertile ground of our common heart (*lectiō*). We would accompany the germination process communally throughout the week, pausing again at another time to speak aloud a word or phrase that is echoing and ruminating within our hearts (*meditatiō*). And maybe a third time we would pause for a longer time to pray from the context of what the Word is saying to us (*oratiō*). A short preaching by one of the sisters at the end of the week would help to lead the community into a deeper expression of our Order's particular charism (*prædicatiō*) Would the experience of the Word *living amongst us* not be more noticeable? Would your own personal *Lectio* not take on a new meaning, helping each sister be more aware that her solitary tilling of the fertile ground of her heart is one small part in cultivating the communal garden of the *holy preaching*? Would we not experience the Lord uniting us quietly in the depths of *His Heart*?

Thursday - Visit to Dachau and Holy Cross Monastery, Regensburg

After a condensed morning prayer and a swift breakfast we set out for Dachau by bus. We arrived in good time and had an hour to walk through the Concentration Camp Memorial Site before having lunch in a nearby restaurant. After lunch we met Sr. Irmengard OCD, from the Carmelite monastery, who explained to us how the foundress, had the idea that in addition to a monument built of stones – the Chapel of Christ's agony was erected 1960 - there should also be a living memorial, a contemplative community, as a sign of hope. After this we had another opportunity for a walk through the camp until 3.15 p.m. when we gathered once more in the chapel for the celebration of the Eucharist.

After Mass we set out for Holy Cross Monastery, Regensburg where we were warmly welcomed by the prioress, Sr Margarete and community. After sung Vespers in the church with the community we enjoyed supper in their beautiful monastic refectory – being served some typical Bavarian dishes. There followed a short tour of the monastery which dates from 1233, before boarding our bus again for the homeward journey - arriving at Strahlfeld around 10 p.m., tired but happy to have experienced such a memorable day which will not easily be forgotten.

Friday and Saturday were given over to discussion and sharing. Firstly Fr Brian gave us a short account of his vocation and his work since he joined the Order after which Sr M Breda spoke about the work of the international commission of the nuns and the bulletin *Monialibus*. Three talks were prepared by the nuns: 'The challenge of our hidden life" by Sr Zdislawa, St Anna Monastery,



Poland; "The challenge of reaching out to the world" by Sr M Magdalena, Lage Monastery, Germany; The challenge of hold both in creative tension" by Sr M Breda, Drogheda, Ireland. After each talk we formed groups according to language where about 8 or 10 sisters shared their experiences. Later, one sister from each group presented a short summary of the sharing to the general assembly.

On Sunday morning there was a meeting of prioresses who were free to invite another sister from their communities along with them. Also present were Fr Brian as promoter and Sr M Breda representing the international commission of the nuns. Fr Manuel moderated this meeting also.

The main topic for discussion was: How can this region continue in the future? Should there be a continuation of this kind of working together? If so what form should it take?

I think that the tone of the meeting was set when one prioress, who had participated in the various meetings from the beginning, said that part of her would die if these meetings and sharings were to stop! She expressed it very beautifully when she said that through these meetings over the past number of years, that the 'Berlin Wall' between our monasteries crumbled. The meeting at Prague in 2005 was a great feast – fruit of our efforts. Again it is obvious to us all that this meeting at Strahlfeld has been very enriching. So the question is not should we continue to meet? but how often and how to organise? This met with the approval of all present and others shared how they too found these meetings enriching and a great benefit to those who participate as well as to our communities at home. A number of sisters said that these meetings were a time of personal formation, their vocation had been strengthened and they had a greater sense of belonging to the wider Dominican Family.

Having discussed some of the difficulties of organising these meetings we finally agreed on holding the next meeting in approximately four years.

Later in the morning Fr Manuel again moderated a session of the general assembly for an evaluation - some of the main points which were voiced are as follows.

- 20 years ago this meeting would not have been possible!
- Fr Brian's retreat, especially the lectures, was a great blessing; grateful for the opportunity of getting to know him. Appreciation of all inputs and sharing
- Impressed with how Fr Manuel has passed on the job to Fr Brian – example of co-operation.
- Joy of being together, friendship, exchange of views, insight into different cultures, realise we have the same problems and struggles - one result: we must meet again!
- Beautiful liturgy – appreciation of all the preparatory work.
- Amazement that the language barrier was not a problem to communication! We discovered the language of acceptance, tolerance and love. Sisters felt accepted as they are! Some were encouraged to learn a foreign language!
- Fr Brian's talks helped us to see nuns' place in the 'holy preaching' Our visits to Dachau and our sisters at Regensburg were very memorable occasions – very impressed with Vespers at Regensburg and the warm hospitality of the community.
- The presence of our Brothers meant a lot to us! – their interest, help and encouragement,
- Imagined before coming that it would be nice but superficial but the experience was very genuine – in fact it went far beyond all expectations. Irritated at not being able to speak in another language.

After a longer than usual siesta we celebrated our final Eucharist combined with Vespers – this was a very joyful and moving celebration.

After supper we assembled in the conference room for recreation which was enlivened by traditional song, dance, drama, music, poetry etc. Of course there were some drinks, chocolates and other delicacies to keep energy high. After all this it was time to begin our 'good-bye' as our Polish sisters were leaving

at midnight by bus which had travelled all the way from Poland earlier that afternoon! On their arrival at Cracow next day some of these sisters would need to catch public transport for their onward journey

to the monasteries of St Anna and Radonie. At 2 a.m. Fr Brian would be leaving for the Munich airport - a 3 hour journey. The remainder of us went to our beds and prepared for our own respective journeys on Monday morning.

It is true to say that each sister's heart overflowed with gratitude for the blessing of sharing these days together which had deepened our appreciation of our vocation as Dominican nuns and we were leaving Strahlfeld determined to share with our sisters at home what we had experienced so that together we may put into practice what we had learned.

Further information on this meeting and monasteries of this region see www.euromon-op-2008.de

Original: English

Affectivity and Sexuality in the project of Dominican Consecrated life

Seventy participants (nuns, brothers, and apostolic sisters) coming from eighteen Latin American and Caribbean countries, met in the beautiful city of Lima, in order to participate in the 2nd Course-Workshop for formators, which was animated by CODALC and CIDALC.

The course worked on the basic elements of human sexuality and affectivity from an integrated and integrating vision of the different constitutive dimensions of the person, taking as a starting point the reality of the companion in his levels of awareness.

Likewise it offered a biblical, anthropological, theological and Dominican framework for the process of the integration of human sexuality and affectivity in order to consolidate one's identity as man or woman who opted for the consecrated and Dominican way of life.

It helped to clarify human situations –consistencies and conflicts – that are generated in consecrated life in the field of sexuality and affectivity.

It allowed one to establish pedagogical elements for the accompaniment of sexuality and affectivity in the formative process.

And lastly, it offered a shared and profound experience of God, formation, and fraternity in this important theme as companions to the brothers and sisters in their initial formation.

Eminent Dominican friars and sisters such as Jesús Espeja, Antonieta Potente (theologians), Maria Julia Ardito (sexologist), Rafael Colomé and Irene Diaz (psychologists) collaborated. They helped fulfill each of the objectives from different interdisciplinary points of view. Because of this the objectives were attained, giving depth to the course and making it useful to all those participating. Fifteen whole days intensely blended fraternity and joy, during which brothers and sisters using the appropriate tools carefully studied their work regarding initial formation in the Order in Latin American countries. Heartfelt thanks and acknowledgement go to Dominican Sisters International (DSI) for the financial support they offered, and the management of the necessary resources. These were of vital importance for making this course possible. It was a beautiful meeting between brothers and sisters, and an authentic way of a reasonable collaboration as a family.

One can consult the themes, photos and chronicle in detail in: www.cidalc.op.org and www.codalc.org

Coordinating committee:

Sr Rosa Luz Manrique, O.P (contemplative nun)

Sr Gioconda Borelli, O.P

Sr Irene Díaz, O,P (President of CODALC)

Fr. Rafael Colomé, O.P

Fr. Carlos Cáceres, O.P (Promoter of formation and Intellectual life)

Original: Spanish

The challenge of holding both aspects (i.e. the hidden life and outreach to the world) in creative tension

Introduction

I have been asked to speak on the challenge of holding the contemplative/hidden dimension of our life in creative tension with the apostolic thrust of reaching out to the world. This challenge is not something new – indeed it is as old as the Church itself. We find it in the Gospel in the story of Martha and Mary,³ in the Acts of the Apostles⁴ and in our Order there always has been the challenge of preserving the balance between contemplation and apostolic works.

I certainly found the writing of this paper a challenge for I am very aware of the diverse cultures and languages of this region, which stretches across the northern part of Europe and dips down to Portugal on the west and Greece on the East. Each of our monasteries finds itself in a different life situation with many options and possibilities of reaching out to the people of surrounding areas who come flocking to our monastery doors. Nowadays we can even reach further afield via internet. All of this is good and the Church and the Order encourages us to be centres of prayer and hospitality in a world which is fast losing its sense of God.⁵ Since I lack personal experience of the individual circumstances of the majority of the monasteries in the region, I do not feel competent to address the question of particular ways and means of outreach – this is a matter for each community to discern. Instead I have chosen to focus on the broader spectrum of our vocation as nuns in the Order of Preachers. To focus too much attention on particular issues can sometimes be an escape from the real challenge facing us as Dominican Nuns today.

For the most part I have drawn inspiration from our Constitutions, the early sources of our tradition, letters of the Masters of the Order, the General Chapters, and Church documents of recent decades.

Above all I was challenged personally as I prayed and struggled for many hours and days with the subject of this paper which led me to reflect on my own vocation as a Dominican nun. I am aware that what I present here is a personal vision of our vocation. This may resonate with some of you but maybe not so with others. However I hope that it will motivate all of us to reflect more deeply on our Dominican vocation and our place in the Order and Church of the 21st century.

³ Lk 10: 38-42

⁴ Acts Ch 6 ff

⁵ LCM No 14; 83; *Verbi Sponsa* 8; Letter of Timothy Radcliffe OP: *A Contemplative Life* 2001

Personal Story

From a very early age – in fact for as long as I can remember – I cherished a deep longing to be a missionary sister. This desire grew stronger with each passing year until during my final year at school I realised that as a missionary I would be confined to one area of the globe and maybe after all I would not be able to do all that I desired to bring the Gospel to those who had never heard of Jesus. Simultaneous with this realisation I felt the Lord calling me to give myself completely to him in the contemplative life, so that through prayer and union with Him I could bring the knowledge of His love to the whole world. It took another year before I got in touch with the Dominicans but what a surprise and joy to discover that Dominican life and spirituality corresponded to this two-pronged desire which at this point consumed my heart – to give myself unreservedly to God in silence and solitude and precisely by so doing to make Him known and loved throughout the world – two seemingly contradictory ideals but for us Dominicans – whether friar, sister, lay person or nun – the holding of these two together is the very essence of our identity.

As I see it: the apostolic thrust in the heart of a Dominican Nun is limitless – there is no boundary line – ideally we must reach out to the whole of humankind, irrespective of race, colour or religion – our hearts need to be constantly expanding to embrace the multitudes. It is equally true that our contemplative life demands of us to embark on a journey into a bottomless abyss – which is nothing other than the abyss of communion with the Holy Trinity – as St Catherine reminds us: “You eternal Trinity, are a deep sea: the more I enter you the more I discover, and the more I discover the more I seek you. You are insatiable, you in whose depth the soul is sated yet remains always hungry for you, thirsty for you.”⁶ The question remains: ‘How do I reconcile these two abysses within? Are they contradictory or complementary? I dare to think that in fact each complements and energises the other.

Example of Jesus

No doubt, Jesus himself experienced this tension for he was totally orientated to the praise and glory of his Father while loving us humans to the end. In fact this is what led him to the Cross where we see him emptied of all dignity - forsaken by friends and even crying out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The folly of the Cross is truly a great mystery! At the very moment when Jesus is most helpless and vulnerable, nailed to the Cross immobile

- a great hollow space is dug out, as it were, in His heart for us;
- he reaches out to embrace sinful humanity, taking every individual within Himself, not leaving anything outside His suffering and the transformation of that suffering into pure love
- He speaks out both His and our ‘yes’ to the Father
- as He commends His Spirit into the hands of the Father (Lk 23:46) He donates Him to us (Jn 19:30)
- and from His fullness we have all received.⁷

Jesus’ kenosis to the point of becoming a ‘nothingness’ out of love is the climax of God’s self revelation – the icon of the eternal love which is at the heart of the Trinity. This is what we, in our turn, are called to become - a ‘nothingness’ out of love for our brothers and sisters as we share in the self emptying of Jesus. As our Constitutions invite us “to bear the death of Jesus in body and soul that we may merit the glory of the resurrection for ourselves and others”⁸

⁶ St Catherine of Siena: *Dialogue* 167

⁷ Cf Thomas J Norris: *Living a Spirituality of Communion*, pg 142

⁸ LCM No 61

Dominic and the early tradition of the Order

The Cross has always been central to Dominican spirituality – we are all familiar with Fra Angelico's beautiful frescos of Dominic at the foot of the Cross. Cassian, whom Dominic studied while a Canon at Osma, describes the goal of monastic life as our transformation into the perfect nakedness of Christ – Christ on the Cross, in His vulnerability, weakness and poverty, without aggression, hostility or power. Dominic was steeped in this tradition and no doubt taught it to the first nuns whom the Blessed Cecilia says "had no other master to instruct them about the Order." However, in addition to the ancient monastic tradition with its preoccupation with personal salvation, Dominic would also have communicated his own zeal and longing for the salvation of all people – the fruit of long hours of contemplating the Cross of Christ. There he learned from the 'Book of Love' the immense love of our Saviour which led Him to the Cross. Contemplating the suffering, forsaken Jesus, Dominic's compassionate heart was torn apart with compassion, firstly, for Jesus whose love was being rejected by the very ones for whom he died, and secondly for his contemporaries and all those near and far who knowingly or unknowingly were rejecting the gift of salvation. Paul Murray notes that the "wound of knowledge that opens up Dominic's heart in contemplation, allowing him with an awesome unprotectedness to experience his neighbour's need, cannot be accounted for simply by his own natural sympathy. The apostolic wound Dominic receives is a contemplative wound"⁹- no doubt the fruit of his 'special' prayer when, as a Canon at Osma, he asked God "to grant him true charity, which would be effective in caring for and winning the salvation of all; he (Dominic) thought he would only be a member of Christ's Body when he could spend himself utterly with all his strength in the winning of souls, just as the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of us all gave himself up entirely for our salvation."¹⁰ We can say that our Order was born at the foot of the Cross and it is there that each of us must draw our inspiration and zeal. This too is the source from which renewal will spring.

In his correspondence with Blessed Diana, Blessed Jordan speaks about the one love at the source of her "remaining in the quietude of her convent" and his "divers wanderings".¹¹ In letter 45 he exhorts her always to have before her eyes "the book of life, the book of the Lord's perfect law which brings life back to souls". And he continues: "this law is charity: you see it when you gaze on your Saviour Jesus stretched out on the Cross, as though a parchment, his wounds the writing, his blood the illuminations. Where, I ask you, my beloved, could the lesson of love be learnt as it is learnt here?" And according to St Catherine of Siena, Dominic wanted his children to "stand at the table of the Cross – to seek only the glory and praise of God and the salvation of souls".¹² As we take our place with Dominic and Mary at the foot of the Cross we begin to understand the meaning of our vocation and somehow the apparent tension between the contemplative and apostolic thrust is dissolved and becomes one great fathomless Love.

The Cross and Veritas

There is a very close link between the Cross and *Veritas* (Truth) - the motto of our Order. "The Cross verifies the truth about God and the truth about humankind".¹³

The truth about God: When we look at the Cross we are left in no doubt of God's infinite love – the Cross is the epiphany of God's infinite love for us sinful creatures - at the very moment when we are

⁹ Paul Murray OP, *Preachers at Prayer*, pg 30

¹⁰ Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus* 13

¹¹ Letter 37 – Jordan to Diana

¹² Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue* 158

¹³ Pope Benedict XVI – homily March 26, 2006; cf *Encyclical Deus Caritas Est*.

turned away from Him and lost in our own selfishness He turned as it were against himself in order to raise us up and save us. This is how God loves.

The truth about humans: the Cross reveals the dignity of every person – how precious we are in God’s sight that He should die for us!

But the Cross does not rob us of joy – the contrary is true as we sing in the liturgy: “through the Cross joy has come into the whole world”¹⁴ and with it freedom. Jesus has taken the burden of our sin on Himself and has already achieved our eternal salvation. Our task lies not in anxious striving to achieve our own perfection but in opening ourselves to receive the gift. “At the very moment when he identifies with our sin, ‘abandoned’ by the Father, Jesus ‘abandons’ himself into the hands of the Father”.¹⁵ We in our turn can abandon ourselves and those we carry in our hearts to the loving mercy of our God in the sure hope that “all will be well”.¹⁶

Intercessory Prayer

The following quotation from Jean Corbon challenged me when I first read it last year:

“The Cross of his Son is the place from which God seems most absent but in which He in fact gives Himself most completely. The place where His Christ is crucified is the place where His compassion is poured out, for it is the place where man is most deeply wounded by death.

People today are surprised at the deep silence of God, but who is willing to enter into the silence of the compassion of Jesus, to follow him that far? It is only a stone’s throw between the slumber of the disciples and the agony of their Lord – to cross that space is to enter the struggle of prayer, intercession and compassion.”¹⁷

I asked myself how often do I stay comfortably in slumber heedless of the Lord’s invitation to cross the boundary line and engage in the struggle. Is this not the heart of our vocation? – for we do not come apart only to find a space of peace and quiet for contemplation, nor to exercise an apostolate from within the enclosure but in order to engage in the “struggle of prayer, intercession and compassion” – and thus to “perpetuate that singular gift which the blessed Father had of bearing sinners, the down trodden and the afflicted in the inmost sanctuary of his compassion.”¹⁸ As we struggle with our own weakness, sinfulness and wounds of sin we are united in a more profound manner with our brothers and sisters wherever they may be. Immersed as we are in a culture of ‘doing’, of feverish activity; wanting to see results and see them instantly; in the midst of a growing secularisation and a corresponding thirst among so many who are searching – very often in the wrong place - there is a great temptation to do something. As our hearts ache while we helplessly watch so many lose faith and walk away from the Church we feel the pressing need to seek solutions. Faced with the silence of God in the darkness of our own lives, we often feel numbed and even begin to lose faith in the efficacy of our way of life. We must resist the temptation to compensate for our emptiness by turning to external activity. It is then we need to remember Eckhart’s advice “Do not waver from your emptiness!” However, contemplation of the Cross teaches us another way! Jesus conquered sin by becoming sin for us. “He lived the reality of the other to the point where he carries the whole ‘baggage’ of the other”.¹⁹ Are we today called to experience the “loneliness, meaninglessness, abandonment, anguish and despair” of our

¹⁴ Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, 14th September.

¹⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 26

¹⁶ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*

¹⁷ Jean Corbon, *The Wellspring of Worship*, pg 247

¹⁸ LCM 35

¹⁹ Thomas J Norris, *Living a Spirituality of Communion*, pg 81

contemporaries to the point of the darkness and forsakenness of the Cross? We need to encourage each other not to be afraid to go to that forsaken place within our own heart and there wait for the Lord's mercy and healing for ourselves and others. For let us be honest, the big crosses which we imagine we could heroically shoulder do not often come our way – perhaps because the Lord knows that this would only foster our pride! – rather it is those little crosses which are part and parcel of everyday life and which we bear with so much distaste – disappointment, misunderstanding, hurt, crises and limitations – which are our 'gold' if only we had eyes to see!

It is when we have the courage to make this journey into silence, to the lonely place of our heart where we experience our own poverty and sinfulness, that we are most profoundly united to our brothers and sisters. It is here too that we experience the Risen Jesus calling us by name and we can say with Paul: "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me"²⁰ - our prayer becomes the prayer of Christ before the Father asking that all be gathered into unity: "Father may they be one in us".²¹ At the beginning of the 21st century Pope John Paul II proposed to the whole Church the challenge of living a spirituality of communion in order to make the Church more credible in our day and he goes on to explain what he means: it is "to know how to make room for our brothers and sisters, bearing each other's burdens and resisting the selfish temptations which constantly beset us and provoke competition, careerism, distrust and jealousy."²²

Communion in the mission of the Order

The unity of our Dominican family is analogous to the unity of the Church – a unity in diversity – when each part functions as it should the family builds itself up in love.²³ When promulgating the 1971 revision of our Constitutions Fr Anicetus Fernandez wrote: "the integral purpose of the Order i.e. to give to others the fruits of contemplation cannot be attained in that fullness proper to it except through the cooperation of all the members of the family" and he continues: "the contemplative life of the nuns is of the greatest benefit to the apostolate of the Order ...because their contemplation and their life inasmuch as they are truly and properly Dominican are from the beginning and by their very nature ordered to the apostolate which the Dominican family exercises as a whole and in which alone the fullness of the Dominican vocation is to be found".²⁴

'Apostles of the Apostles'

So the contemplative life of the nuns is ordered to the apostolate which the Dominican family exercises as a whole. Earlier Fr Fernandez described the vocation of the nuns as 'apostles of the apostles' - not by "giving themselves up to the apostolate" but by "being with God in solitude, cloister, silence, fraternal love, liturgy and prayer" – and he continued: "in spite of your hidden life one can truly say you are witnesses – you share your vision first with us, friars, and then with the entire Church – in that sense you are 'apostles of the apostles'. Dominic wanted the nuns at the very heart of his Order so that this loving presence, this incessant contemplation of Jesus Christ and that alone might constitute the strength of all."²⁵ When speaking to the Spanish nuns earlier this year Fr Carlos asked them "Nuns, show us the Order!"²⁶

²⁰ Gal 2:20

²¹ Jn 17:21

²² Pope John Paul II: *Novo Millennio Ineunte* 43

²³ Cf Eph 3:16

²⁴ Letter of Fr Anicetus Fernandez OP, General Chapter, Tallaght, July 1971

²⁵ Letter of Fr Anicetus Fernandez OP to the Nuns of Order, October 1970

²⁶ Cf *Monialibus* 19.

Nowhere in recent documents or letters from the Order or Church do we find any suggestion that we should engage in an external apostolate as such. On the contrary, *Verbi Sponsa* says: "cloistered contemplatives are not asked to be involved in new forms of active presence but to remain at the wellspring of Trinitarian communion, dwelling at the very heart of the Church".²⁷ From our brothers at the General Chapter in Bogota we hear: "For 800 years you have sought, pondered and called upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in solitude so that the word proceeding from the mouth of God may not return to Him empty, but may accomplish those things for which it was sent. Your prayer, your life of contemplation, your world of enclosure and silence – without abandoning humanity as the place to meet God – your work, your seeking the truth of things, your belief in God's faithfulness, your searching the Scriptures with loving hearts, your practice of penance – all of this is the way you share in the common mission of the Order."²⁸

LCM

Last but not least, our Constitutions provide us with a clear vision of our vocation as nuns in the Order of Preachers. When working on the revision of LCM in 1970 Fr Fernandez wrote about his "anxiety to underline the fact that we are nuns and Dominican nuns". This phrase "nuns and Dominican nuns" has impressed me very forcibly and I feel that this is the issue in question when we speak about holding in balance our 'hidden life' with its monastic values (nuns) and our 'outreach' to the world (Dominican nuns) – which implies an apostolic thrust. Even a cursory reading of our Constitutions demonstrates how well this balance was achieved. For example LCM 96 states: "the nuns while commissioned by God primarily for prayer are not for that reason excluded from the ministry of the word. For they listen to the Word, celebrate it and keep it in their hearts and in this way proclaim the Gospel by the example of their life." The emphasis here is on the quality of our life which is a true preaching of the Word. According to Fr Simon Tugwell OP the friars preach redemption while the nuns are an experiment in redemption.²⁹ In Distinction I: Section I of our Constitutions we find several texts with explicit mention of the nuns providing a lived example of what our brothers and sisters preach - and so together we fulfil the mission of the Order.³⁰ Above all, our celebration of the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, while being the heart and wellspring of our whole life is also a true preaching - there the mystery of our salvation is present and at work - there God is glorified and humankind is sanctified.

Conclusion

At a time when the Order as a whole is facing the challenge of retrieving its contemplative character, and have explicitly appealed to the nuns to challenge their excessive activism,³¹ it is vital that we the nuns not lose faith in the essence of our vocation or begin to seek 'apostolates' – all good and much needed in themselves but which would limit our horizons for we have been given a priceless gift and treasure in our contemplative way of life in the Order of Preachers but "we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's – not our own" (2Cor 4:2). Therefore we need to have the courage in our time 'not to waver from our emptiness'.

In our modern world, where human effort and achievement are overemphasised, there is a great need for people who 'say' with their lives that God exists, that He has revealed Himself as love – even to

²⁷ *Verbi Sponsa* 6

²⁸ Acts of General Chapter, Bogota. 45

²⁹ Conference to our community in Drogheda

³⁰ For example: community life: LCM 2:II; 3:II; vows: LCM 18,19; 23,24,27,28 etc.

³¹ General Chapters: Oakland

the Cross – so as to bring us humans into a personal relationship with the Holy Trinity as Fr Timothy Radcliffe has so beautifully expressed it in his letter *A Contemplative Life*. "You are missionaries just as much as the brethren, not by going anywhere but by living your lives from God and for God. You are a preached word in your being. The life of the nun is hollowed out by emptiness. Your lives are empty of purpose other than to be there for God. You do not do anything especially useful. But that emptiness is a hollow space in which God dwells and where we glimpse his glory."³²

If we are what we should be, we would set fire to the whole of Europe for "A city built on a hill cannot be hidden".

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2016- Jubilee of the foundation of the Order of Preachers

As we all know, since Advent of 2005 the Dominican Family worldwide has been preparing to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the confirmation of the Order of Preachers, which will happen in 2016. We began this grace-filled pilgrimage by commemorating the founding of the first Dominican community in Prouilhe - the birth place of the Holy Preaching. This past year we remembered the important place that the Holy Rosary has played in the history and tradition of our Order. Certainly for all of us, it is the figure of St. Dominic that unites us during these important years. This year, therefore, we are invited to pause and focus on the following theme: «In the beginning was the Word: Dominic, Preacher of Grace».

The brothers and sisters who minister in the General Curia at Santa Sabina in Rome, in an attempt to give these ten years of Jubilee Pilgrimage a central focus, have decided to group the entire decade of Jubilee years under one general guiding theme, a theme that emerges from this year dedicated to St. Paul: «Woe to us if we do not preach the gospel!» (cf. 1 Cor 9:16). These words of St. Paul, which could be said to be at the heart of our Dominican vocation, will be the guiding light that enlightens our steps as we journey to the Jubilee celebration of 2016. The sub-theme provided for each year (see below), offers us the opportunity to focus on a particular dimension of our Dominican life and ministry.

GENERAL THEME

«WOE TO US IF WE DO NOT PREACH THE GOSPEL!» (cf. 1 Cor. 9,16)

³² Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP: Letter to the Order, *A Contemplative Life*, 2001.

YEARLY THEMES TO PREPARE FOR THE JUBILEE:

2009 -«In the beginning was the Word» (Jn 1:1): St. Dominic, Preacher of Grace

2010 -«How can people preach unless they are sent?» (Rom 10:15): The Mission of Preaching

2011- «We hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God»

(Acts 2:11): Preaching and Culture / Community Preaching

2012 -«Go and tell my brothers...» (Jn 20:17): Dominican Women and Preaching

2013 -«Do unto me according to your Word» (Lk 1:38): Mary: Contemplation and Preaching of the Word

2014 - «Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions (Joel 3:1): The Dominican Laity and Preaching.

2015 -«If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free» (John 8:31-32); «For freedom Christ set us free» (Gal 5:1): Dominic: Government, Spirituality and Freedom

2016 -«Woe to us if we do not preach the gospel!» (cf. 1 Cor 9:16): The Order of Preachers: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.



The Second Joyful Mystery: The Visitation

I. Introduction

I have been asked to speak on the topic of visitations by the committee of nuns who planned this meeting. It is an honor for me to have been invited. I've entitled my talk: "The Second Joyful Mystery: the Visitation." Some may chuckle a bit and say it should be "The Second Sorrowful Mystery." I suppose, depending on the circumstance, it could be one or the other.

What I am attempting to do in this paper is: locate a visitation biblically, glance at it historically, explore it constitutionally and advocate it personally. This approach might broaden our discussion later. There is no need to take notes as I will give each of you a copy of my paper.

II. Biblical insight on a divine visitation.

It may seem presumptuous to imagine there is any relation between a visitation of a Monastery and a visitation from God. I would posit it is no more imaginary than seeing a relationship between obedience to God and obedience to one's prioress. It is the fundamental Catholic understating of mediation that under girds both. What insight might Scripture provide for us?

The verb 'to visit' signifies a special divine intervention whether to save or to punish. In God's choice and call to Israel there is always a responsibility placed on the individual or on God's people to live according to what has been promised, i.e. to live out of the covenant. The 'visit' can be a time of accountability, divine favor, a testing or a judgment. Throughout the Old and New Testament the Lord

visited his people repeatedly as a manifestation of his provident care and nearness. The visitations were from God himself, angels, prophets, and later, apostles and disciples of Jesus. Some examples might help.

In the visitation of God to Abraham at the Oak of Mamre in Genesis 18, we see God appearing to Abraham through the three men to whom he gave hospitality. In turn, they promised a son to Abraham and Sarah. At Sarah's doubt, it is the Lord who speaks. We see a mediated visitation, a hospitable welcome, a promise of fruitfulness despite human impossibility, i.e. a strengthening of faith and hope in God's possibility.

Almost the entire book of Exodus is a story of God's visitation to his people through Moses. Just a few quotes to bring back the story!

Exodus 3:2 " *The angel of the Lord appeared to him (Moses) in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush and as he looked, the bush while burning was not consumed.* "

Exodus 3:16 " *Go and gather the elders of Israel together and tell them, Yahweh, the God of your fathers has appeared to me...he has said to me, I have visited you and seen all that the Egyptians are doing to you. And so I have resolved to bring you up out of Egypt.* "

Exodus 4:31 " *The people were convinced and they rejoiced that God had visited the sons of Israel.* "

Exodus 32:34 " *Go now, lead the people...My angel shall go before you, but on the day of my visitation, I shall punish them for their sins.* "

Again what do we see: mediated visitation - (burning bush, angel, voice) direction given for sake of greater liberation and accountability to God's call in choosing them as his people.

And so we can go on - the visit of God to Hannah, then to Samuel through a voice in his sleep and even through Samuel to Eli. God often visits his people through others. We see this continue through the call and preaching of the prophets where the people rarely respond. Yet the prayer of the people - especially when in exile and dire circumstances is: " *Look down from heaven, look at this vine, visit it, and protect what your own right hand has planted.* "Ps 80:14

In the New Testament, we see visitations by God through the Angel at the Annunciation, through Jesus in the incarnation, through the preaching of the 12, especially in the Acts of the Apostles and the journey of St. Paul.

The Acts of Providence held up the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth as its image of Dominican Monastic Life. I do not want to quote this document at length as you have already studied and pondered it. This same image can be used to throw light on the goal of a visitation. Mary is visited by an angel and invited to be the Mother of God's Son. Out of her perplexity she consents. Then silence. She journeys to Elizabeth. In that visitation, Elizabeth confirms for Mary what God is doing in her. "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made to her would be fulfilled." And, in turn, the life in Elizabeth is quickened. It is later, at the birth of John that Zechariah proclaims: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited his people and set them free." The consequence of this visitation is a freedom to praise God and to recognize God's presence in and through human instrumentality and historical events.

From the Scriptures we can see that a visitation did several things: 1) held the people responsible to live according to the Covenant; 2) it was a time of accountability by both God and the people; 3) it was a manifestation of provident care, nearness, and fruitfulness, 4) it was a moment of conversion and transformation. Are not some of these elements present in a visitation?

III. A glance at history

The apostles and their successors visited the various Christian communities under their supervision to give encouragement, respond to conflicts and to strengthen their commitment to Christ.

In the early Church as monastic life developed and monasteries, independent from one another, were founded they become subject to the local Bishop. Thus the council of Chalcedon decreed that "the bishop...shall exercise proper supervision of the monasteries." Such visits were intended to examine how well the rule of life was being observed. There gradually developed a strong feeling of independence from episcopal jurisdiction, so that by the 10th century monasteries began to centralize themselves and seek papal grants of exemption, and visitations by their own major superiors.

However, even in other aspects of ecclesial life, visitations began to develop. As early as the 6th century, there were to be episcopal visitations of a diocese. In the 13th century, papal decrees and regional councils encouraged a whole system of visitation - both bishops and metropolitans. Trent called for biennial visitations.

We also have an example of the "Ad limina" visitation. In 11th century, Gregory VII obliged all metropolitans to visit the Pope, render an account and be strengthened in their apostolic ministry. This still occurs every 5 years.

In the monastic tradition, we see with the Cistercians and the Charter of Charity visitations becoming obligatory by the Abbot of the founding monastery. In 1155, with the approval of Callistus II, this development of visitations, along with Chapters of abbots, form an outline of a religious order consisting of autonomous houses within one true spiritual family. Probably this was the work of St. Stephen Harding.

Eventually monastic reforms divided monasteries into regional congregations of autonomous monasteries but with a system of visitators, and President's. Leo XIII formalized this further and, I believe, it was with him that the whole Benedictine family today has an Abbot Primate.

Often one of the opinions most offered in the breakdown of monastic life, and that of the friars, in the 14th and 15th centuries is that visitations were not being done.

Thus, as one looks at Church history and monastic history there is the development of visitations as a clear help in insuring that the life flourishes through the correction of abuses and the strengthening of the charism. This does not weaken autonomy but rather strengthens it by insuring its health and limiting its tendency toward isolation. The Church and religious orders in the course of history have come to see visitation as a necessary and positive factor in sustaining and strengthening the charism of a monastic and religious family.

IV. Dominican legislation - Friars and Nuns

LCO 340 and 341 calls for prior provincials to visitate every house of a province every two years and houses of formation every year. This visitation is essential for the health of a province. Father Timothy in his "relatio" to the Order at the end of his term stated that provinces where the visitation was done were healthier than where it was not done.

At the General Chapter of Providence Acta #457 responds to Timothy's statement saying: *"We exhort provincials and all who are charged with the task of visitation in a province or vicariate to be most vigilant in making the visitation of the brethren required by LCO 340 and 341. These regular visitations strengthen the common life of a house, foster internal unity of an entity and insure that ordinations and recommendations of general and provincial chapters are implemented. During a visitation, the provincial should meet with each brother individually. Soon after the visitation, the provincial is to give a written report of his observations and ordinations (LCO 341.1). The superior with the local community should give a written account, within the time frame which the provincial may stipulate in his report, of how it has implemented the ordinations and recommendations of the visitation."*

Regarding the Nuns, we know that the Master is the proper and immediate superior of every Monastery (LCM 228) The Acts of the General Chapter of Providence #343 and 344 says this regarding visitation.

"Among the most important services to the life of the nuns which pertains to the Master of the Order to carry out is that of visitation. Indeed, as Regular Superior (LCM 238), the Master of the Order can always make a visitation in matters concerning the internal government of the monastery (LCM 228.III). The aim of visitation is to help a community to be 'effectively responsible for its own life and to be free to face its challenges' (fr. Timothy Radcliffe in his letter to the Order on the nuns)." Conscious of its importance, we encourage the nuns to ask for this service from the Master of the Order, so that, whether in person or by a delegate, such visitation may take place every two (LCM 227, III.3) or three years.

V. Difficulties and Fears of Visitations

It is important to note that a visitation is not a cure all - indeed, a visitation, since it is done by fallible human beings can be harmful. This is the reality of Catholic, ecclesial authority. Popes, bishops and people in pastoral positions can do harm to the Church. But, this does not exclude the need for them. Even God works through them.

A visitation is not to make all monasteries alike since each house has its own spirit and, through its Directory, legitimately interprets the observances a bit differently. A danger is when one house sees itself as normative and by which it judges all the others.

The safe guard today in making sure a visitation is beneficial is the development of the Chapter which has matured the nuns as well as the visitor's awareness that without the effective participation and support of the nuns, the visitation will have little effect in the long haul. Working with the Chapter effectively prevents the ideological bias of a visitor from becoming dominant.

At the present time a visitation from the Order can be a means to facilitate the chapter in resolving any difficulties which might need to be addressed. It allows for every sister to speak freely both about the positive aspect of her community and to share any concerns which she thinks need to be discussed. A visitation should be a fraternal exchange of members of the Order and a moment of grace for the community. (My addendum to this paper suggests a model that has proven helpful to the nuns from my experience.)

Another safeguard is the frequency of a visitation. If it is regular, it becomes a normal part of Dominican government. It is an opportunity for the release of tensions and manifestation of frustrations. In my experience, where regular visitations occur, they tend to only fine tune that which is moving along quite well.

VI. Conclusion:

The visitation is primarily a time of grace. In faith, it should be seen as a manifestation of God's favor. It is a time of accountability as a community reflects on its manner of living one's vowed covenant according to the rule and constitutions. It is a safeguard from a myopic vision and insularity through an outside perspective. It can be a strengthening of the charism and a concrete realization of one's relationship to the Master and therefore a fulfillment of one's vow. It can be a time of conversion, purification and transformation.

I entitled my talk "The Second Joyful Mystery." Obviously the first joyful mystery of our vocation is the invitation, the call, the announcement, the annunciation if you will with the great mystery being our "fiat." Yet we know in the course of time fidelity to our call can easily become tarnished with small, even major, infidelities. Conflicts within a monastery can easily arise, especially

during this time of the on-going renewal and understanding of our particular vocation. Thus, we are called to correction and conversion. The Acts of Providence urges the nuns to view visitations as "a service of the Master" to them and to ask that such a service be rendered.

So, too, our communities, provinces and monasteries can find the vision of their call weakened and the faithful observance of the call minimized. It is the second joyful mystery that finds Mary confirmed by her aging cousin, Elizabeth. "Blessed is she who believed that the promise made here by the Lord would be fulfilled. The mystery of Mary's call and her fiat is confirmed. It seems to me, ultimately this is what a visitation is meant to do. Believe in your call and allow that belief to be joyfully lived through the sorrows of this life into the glory of the next.

Fr. Edward Ruane, op
Vicar of the Master of the Order
Original: English

Open forum

In the last two ICNOP meeting, we considered the possibility that the Monialibus, apart from being a means to inform us about what happens in "our monastic world", could also be a useful means to encourage the life of our communities and to foster the communion among us the nuns. For this reason, we decided to create a new section in our bulletin called "open forum" where all the nuns could freely express their opinions, experiences, ideas, fears, dreams...about a proposed topic.

This twentieth issue of the Monialibus opens this new section and it leaves to your reflection the topic about the Visitation which our brother fr. Edward, op. has exposed so beautifully.

Note: *The comments about this topic which you would like to share in the Monialibus should be sent to your representatives in the commission and they will be published.*

Original: Spanish
