

Monialibus

*Nuns of the Order of Preachers
International Bulletin*



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Year 2010 - The Mission of Preaching



"How can people preach unless they are sent?"

(Rm 10, 15)

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Letter of fr. Brian, OP

My Dear Sisters in St. Dominic,



The *Shema Israel*, prayed twice a day at morning and evening prayer, is considered one of the holiest prayers of Judaism.

Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your hearts; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise (Dt 6:4-7).

As Christians we are also familiar with this Hebrew text, and in fact, Jesus himself quotes it in answer to a scribe's question about which is the first of all the commandments: Jesus replied, "The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mk 12, 29-31).

For us Dominicans the *Shema Israel* is like a key that can open for us a rich experience of prayer. I say that this prayer is very Dominican because it begins with the invitation to *listen to God* and to God's word: "*Hear, O Israel...*"

On the door of my cell in Santa Sabina, I have a small picture of St. Dominic, walking barefoot, carrying his shoes over his shoulders and the Scriptures in his hand. One immediately sees Dominic, the itinerant, on his way to preach. This image was painted by a dear Peruvian Dominican friar, fr Guillermo Alvarez, OP, who was my student master for a year in the 1980's. It is one of my favourite

images of Dominic, because it shows him as a simple, itinerant preacher. He is walking along the way, speaking to God and about God. The *Shema* prayer reminds us that the Word of God is to be upon our hearts and that we are to speak about this Word as we walk along the way. Surely, Dominic knew this text well, wanting nothing more than to be faithful to it.

Each Saturday night, as we move into the Day of the LORD, we, too, hear the *Shema* proclaimed at Compline: "Hear, O Israel!" It is a reminder that we are being called in each and every moment of our Dominican life to listen to God's Word, inviting it to "be upon our hearts." In the LCM, the nuns are reminded that, "The purpose of all regular observance, especially enclosure and silence, is that the Word of God may dwell abundantly in the monastery" (96 §II).

There is a beautiful phrase found in one of the documents from the *Synod on the Word of God* that was held in Rome in 2008. It is one that I have quoted in many workshops in monasteries throughout the world, because I believe it points to the mendicant spirit which is at the very heart of our preaching charism. The phrase is from the initial Synod document called the *Lineamenta*, it is simple and to the point: "Above all, the Word of God should be received with the soul of the poor, interiorly and also exteriorly" (n. 24).

What does it mean for us to receive God's Word with a hungry, poor, mendicant heart and soul? For every Dominican, lay or religious, brother or sister, the Word of God is our daily bread. Do we hunger for this bread each day?

After we beg for God's Word, then we are sent to teach that word and to speak of it in all places and at all times. We beg for the word through daily *Lectio Divina*, through our liturgical prayer and study. In a conversation with one of the nuns of Caleruega in June, I told her that we Dominicans are invited to live a very deep mystery: being poor, we have no option but to stand naked before God and beg for the Word. But no sooner have we received that Word, when we are asked to give it away –

as a Word of hope, healing and life for others. We begin poor, and after preaching, we are poor again. This is, I believe, the most profound dimension of our life of mendicancy.

Think of the shepherds in Luke's Gospel, who set off in haste after hearing the Good News announced by the angels on that dark night outside of Bethlehem. They were poor, margined members of society. They had nothing but the silence of the night and the companionship that united them. But once they had *listened* and *received* the Good News, they set off rejoicing, ready to give to others the very gift that they had received. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the Word that they had heard in their silence took on a human face – in the small baby lying in the manger. They contemplated the beautiful child, told the story of their encounter with the angels, and “returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen” (Lk 1:20). They returned to the hills to give to others the fruit of their contemplation. “Freely you have received; freely you are to give” (Mt 10:8).

How often we pray in the Psalms the phrase: “Lord, when shall we see your face?” This is the cry of all of humanity, even those who are not aware of it. It is the cry of the human heart. Sisters, I think Dominic has left us a great intuition, and personally I think that it is *you*, the nuns, who need to help us to discover this great truth. I think that Dominic understood that if we *listen* to God's Word and carry it in our mendicant hearts we will, in fact, be led to the contemplative encounter with God. We will see the face of God.

But this will only happen if we have “the soul of the poor.” Yes, it is when we feel poorest and most empty that God can finally sow deep within us the Word that sets us free. As we hear Jesus says in the Gospel of John: “If you remain in my word, you are truly my disciples, you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (Jn 8: 31- 32).

To be a true preacher, to be a nun in of the Order of Preachers, one must first listen and beg for the Word. Silence is our begging bowl. Without contemplative silence we cannot pray and live the *Shema*.

In July, Pope Benedict XVI visited the

Abruzzi region of Italy, an area which was devastated last year by an earthquake. His trip marked the 800th anniversary of the birth of Celestine V, the only Pope in history to have abdicated the papacy. The Holy Father, reflecting on the life of this 13th-century pope, said:

“Holiness, in fact, never loses its own power of attraction, it is not forgotten, it never goes out of fashion, indeed, with the passage of time, it shines with ever greater luminosity, expressing [our] perennial longing for God ... [St. Peter Celestine] went in search of truth and happiness, he went in search of God and, to hear his voice ... Silence thus became the element that characterized his daily life. And it is precisely in external silence, but above all in internal silence, that he succeeded in perceiving God's voice, a voice that was able to guide his life.”

“We live in a society in which it seems that every space, every moment must be ‘filled’ with initiatives, activity, sound; often there is not even time to listen and dialogue. Dear brothers and sisters! Let us not be afraid to be silent outside and inside ourselves, so that we are able not only to perceive God's voice, but also the voice of the person next to us, the voices of others.”

So, my dear sisters, we are again invited into the mystery of God's Word, which necessarily plunges us into the mystery of mendicant silence. As we celebrate the feast of our holy father, St. Dominic, may we imitate his life. Perhaps he is inviting us once again to take off our shoes (become poor again) and to set off to preach with God's Word “upon our hearts.”

Some News:

- Let us all be united in prayer during the days of the upcoming General

Chapter of the Order (which begins on Sept. 1 in Rome). We bid farewell to our dear brother and Master, fr Carlos, and we welcome with open hearts the one whom Lord will anoint as the new successor of St. Dominic.

- In the world of the nuns, we also take this opportunity to express profound gratitude to five sisters who have recently finished their six-year term on the *International Commission of Nuns*: Sr. M. Breda Carroll, OP (Europe), Sr. Isabel María Orenes, OP (Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary, Spain), Sr. Rosa María López, OP (Mexico), Sr. Jean-Thérèse Vauhkonen, OP (France) and Sr. Mary Lucy Chmura, OP (USA-North America). These sisters have given of themselves with great joy. Thank you! In the coming months the Master will name five new sisters to the Commission.
- Sr. Isabel María, OP, the present Editor of *Monialibus*, has very graciously accepted to continue for some more years as Editor. ¡¡Gracias, Sor Isabel María!!
- The Master and the Procurator General of the Order encourage monasteries to enter the data of your monasteries for the Order's On-line catalogus: <http://catalogus.op.org/> -- If you have questions about this, please contact your representative on the International Commission of Nuns.
- There is a new "Library" of documents that will be of interest for the monasteries. Go to the Order's webpage: www.op.org/ and click on the folder "Library." Then scroll down to the folder: *Dominican Nuns - Documents*.

As Promoter of the Nuns, I have enjoyed visiting monasteries in several countries during the past six months. One of the highlights was the eight-day retreat with

nuns from the four monasteries in Colombia. Another similar retreat will be held next year with the four monasteries of Ecuador. I was able to participate for a couple days of the assembly of the nuns of France, and I look forward to similar gatherings with the prioresses from Central-Eastern Europe and the German speaking monasteries. I also look forward to gathering in August with the novice mistresses from the Association of nuns in the United States.

It was a joy to be gathered with more than 100 Spanish nuns for the retreat that the Master gave in Caleruega in June – a wonderful time of blessing (including evening walks in the countryside!). It was a chance for many Spanish nuns to thank fr Carlos for his years of service to the Order.

And finally, I look forward to participating in the first Solemn Professions to be celebrated in the two young monasteries of Vietnam and India during the months of September and October. Please continue to pray for these two new monasteries, as well as the new shoot of Dominican contemplative life in Cochabamba, Bolivia. May God continue bless the nuns of these new foundations with deep faith and fortitude!

And so my dear sisters may God speak to us deeply as we celebrate the Solemnity of St. Dominic, and may the Word sown in the fertile ground of our hearts produce a bountiful harvest for God's kingdom.

Your brother in the Holy Preaching,
fr Brian Pierce, OP

Original: English

Retreat of the nuns of Colombia

From 10th to 17th of February nuns from four monasteries of Colombia, (Saint Agnes, Bogotá; the Most Holy Rosary, Duitama; Our Lady of Graces of Torcoroma, Ocaña, and Holy Spirit; Sogamoso) lived days of grace. We gathered together for the first time in the history of our monasteries to sit down together at the

Master's feet, listening to His Word and contemplating His glory.

This dream came true thanks to the initiative of our Master of the Order, fr. Carlos Azpiroz, op and fr. Brian, op, our Promoter who set their eyes, this time, on Colombia so that we too could be enriched by this experience of a retreat for nuns gathered together from different monasteries. This has been done in other places, especially where there are federations. Unfortunately there are not yet federations in Colombia but this experience of sharing together our prayer, reflection, study, the table of the Bread and of the Word and the other table too! is making straight the way of the Lord. The fact of leaving our monasteries and reducing the geographic distances in order to be together also means that other "distances" are being shortened.

Fifty one nuns out of 62 came together. Besides, two preachers attended! Fr. Brian Pierce, op, who doesn't need an introduction and Fr. Alberto Wulffelé, op, from the Province of Holland, who has been a missionary in Central America for many years - so he had a good knowledge not only of our language but also of the culture of our people. You can imagine what happened when the nuns met: greetings, hugs, meeting someone for the first time, recognizing others, and then we settled in our rooms. Later on we organized the timetable and prepared for the Eucharist which was followed by lunch and a short introductory talk, greetings and some suggestions for the retreat.



Fr. Alberto said that he would share Biblical reflections searching for the truth but it wasn't a course on the Bible. Fr. Brian told us that this wasn't the typical retreat but it would be based on *Lectio Divina* - so there would be a lot of Bible and moments for individual study; all this lived in silence. From Brazil the Master of the Order fr. Carlos sent greetings with Brian, who had just participated in the Assembly of CIDALC. As we had to study a lot during the retreat the Master of the Order dispensed us from the Office of Readings, Terce and None. We sang the Salve and O Lumen and we went to bed.

The official beginning of the retreat was on the 10th. We began with the Eucharist. Fr. Brian, with the simplicity and freedom which characterizes him, entered the chapel with a bunch of flowers and put it on the altar. The gospel of the day was of Mk 7, 14-23: "It is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean". Our Promoter, who presided on this day, in the homily said that "to follow the Lord has nothing to do with external things - that won't make us saints but this work takes place in the depths of our being". He shared with us his morning prayer - he was speaking with a flower and when he asked her where she had bought her dress, she just smiled! He uses beautiful, symbolic language characteristic of a contemplative. He continued: "the beauty of the flower comes from inside, because of the hard and long work of its roots, changing everything to do its preaching. Likewise for us: the Word is like the seed and little by little we must make it a preaching so that people may see the beauty of God"

The theme of the retreat was: "The Gospel of St John and Dominican Spirituality". Fr. Alberto, a specialist in Holy Scripture, converted from Calvinism to Catholicism when he was studying St Thomas Aquinas while preparing to be a Pastor. They were seven brothers in his family, he had a twin.

Each morning, he gave us two Biblical talks on the Gospel of St John. He prepared wonderful material for us which fr. Brian had sent us beforehand by e-mail so that each of us could have a copy to study it. (It is a work of 82

pages, if anyone is interested in it I can send it by e-mail, fr. Alberto gave me his permission).

In his first talk fr. Alberto said that seeing and listening are two important aspects in St John and making an echo from that day's Gospel he emphasized that listening is the beginning of life because the Word comes from inside and we need the spoken word to see, to believe. The witness listens, fills the silence with the desire of listening to the Word and only the one who has seen something through listening can give testimony and be a witness. Each monastery was in charge of the liturgy - which was varied and creative - for two days. The Eucharist was the most intense moment of communion, prayer and contemplation.

During the 8 days each morning fr. Alberto immersed us in the symbols of St John's Gospel with the aim of helping us to contemplate the glory of God manifested in His Son, Jesus Christ, to see and to believe! In the afternoon fr. Brian used the same reading of the Gospel as in the morning focusing on Dominican spirituality to lead us into deeper water. At night, in the chapel, we shared the echoes of the phrases or words which had resounded within us during the day - in this way we shared the "bread of God" which had been given to us during the day and we finished praying Compline.

Mainly fr. Brian in his afternoon talks invited and encouraged us to:

- to empty ourselves of so many things for the essence of our Dominican spirituality is the emptiness which opens us to the Word, having a heart totally available to Him, saying "Here I am" and it is here where God speaks and where preaching is born.
- To nourish ourselves with the Word - this is the foundation of true spirituality - personally and as a community, especially through the practice of the Lectio Divina.
- To break and cross frontiers as Jesus did when he engaged with the Syrophenician woman, that is, removing the barriers between us, accepting that a 'Syrophenician' from another monastery sit down beside us so that we may grow in communion of hearts.

- To give a space to friendship, because this is a true gift which prepares us to live in community, helping us to leave aside our egotism and which is the source of many blessings. Our Dominican tradition is not afraid of love and tenderness.

- To be immersed in the Lord and live in the present moment.
- To cultivate contemplative life and try not to escape or run away from it. We should live the regular observance of silence not as a penance but with the aim that the Dominican tradition has given to it, that is to say, the Word should be born and dwell abundantly in the monastery. He asked if in our monasteries we were cultivating the Word or words.

He shared with us various quotations of contemplatives such as: Master Eckhart, Saint Catherine of Siena, fr Timothy Radcliffe and Thomas Merton. He also shared some testimonies of fr. Peter of Cordoba, Monsignor Pierre Claverie, op Ety Hillesumm and some of Juilia Espinel's poems, and much more but it is difficult to share all of them here.

During these days the Promoter of the nuns of Colombia, fr. Said León, op, visited us and for two days collaborated in the Ministry of Reconciliation. Fr. José Gabriel Mesa, op, Provincial of the province of Colombia was with us once for the Eucharist.

Before Lent began, on Sunday and Tuesday night, we had two recreations which we enjoyed very much - we were dancing traditional dances and songs, games; we even had a puppet show.



Fr. Brian played the guitar; we were surprised by his musical talent. He sang "Amazing grace" one of the most important spiritual songs for the black community in USA. It was composed by a slave dealer who has a very nice story of conversion. He told us this

story before he started singing because it was in English, of course!!!

We also shared gifts during this week. Our brothers gave us a postcard of St. Catherine signed by the two of them. Fr. Alberto told us he had an ache in his hand from so many signatures.

During these days we were living as if we were a family. Three sisters of the Presentation: Sr. Barbara, Sr Araminta and Sr Celia who was 90 years old attended the celebrations, the talks and the recreations. We are very grateful to them for being so kind with us and for letting us enjoy those days in their house. It is a beautiful place, surrounded by mountains; the natural environment invited us to contemplation. I am very grateful to our brothers for their effort to share their experiences, study, prayer and contemplation with us, and especially for their fraternal closeness, THANK YOU VERY MUCH!!! For the two of them.

We finished our retreat on Ash Wednesday with a simple lunch and the farewells began... the last ones to arrive were the first ones to leave. At 3:00 pm we left for Bogotá. Our two brothers came with us as they had to leave from there the following day, fr. Brian in the morning and fr. Alberto at night. They stayed in our monastery so we could continue to enjoy their company for a little longer. We took them to the airport and we were very grateful for so many blessings.

To finish I would like to share a piece of fr. Brian's homily about the reading of the deaf man. He said: "this man couldn't proclaim the Word, nor sing praise. When his ears were opened he became a preacher. This is our life. When we encounter Jesus He puts His Word in our mouth and he says: "Father open your daughter's ears and loosen the ligament of her tongue so that she can proclaim your Word".

The exhortation was: "Your singing is your preaching, if you don't sing with the dignity of God's daughters what are you doing then? Let's live with our tongue loosened. Let's preach the Word. Let's sing praise!" Of course it is not only singing, it is much more - we must interpret this symbolic language.

Dear sisters and brothers who read *Monialibus*, thanks for your patience and thanks to Sr Isabel M^a for inviting us to share this experience in the bulletin. Let's go on singing!

Sor M^a del Pilar Gaitán Torres, op
Monastery St Agnes, Bogotá, Colombia
Original: Spanish

Lectio Divina and community preaching

We would like to share our experience of *Lectio Divina* and of community preaching. In our community the practice of *Lectio* has taken a particular form.

In Sept. of 2006 three of our sisters took part in the spiritual exercises directed by Fr. Brian Pierce OP at Caleruega. They were very special exercises and our three sisters returned very content with their experience. One of the days Fr. Brian spoke to them about the importance and richness of *Lectio* in our lives - even including some practice of *Lectio*.

When they returned, our sisters shared their enthusiasm with the rest of the community and proposed the practice of *Lectio* in community. We began to meet one evening weekly. We used the readings of the following Sunday. The first reading was read and after a few minutes of silence we shared some echoes in the words and phrases of this reading. We then did the same for the psalm, then the second reading and finally the Gospel.

This is how we were doing *Lectio* until March 2009 when Fr. Brian visited us on the occasion of our 6th Centenary of the foundation of the monastery to give us a course on the 'Synod on the Word of God' and on St. Paul. Sisters from other monasteries of our federation joined us for the event. Fr. Brian had already written an article on the practice of *Lectio* and community preaching. At this meeting he spoke of this theme. Before beginning the talks we did a little exercise of *Lectio* which afterwards served him as a base for his preaching

Since in these two years all had gone so well and the community had been so enriched we decided to complete the *Lectio* with a preaching each week by a different sister - from the oldest to the youngest in the community. From then on, three times a week, instead of the short reading at None we just read the Gospel of the Sunday which we were going to use for *Lectio* so that it would be present to us throughout the week. And, besides, as Fr. Brian said, the Gospel we hear at our daily Eucharist would steer us toward the Gospel of the following Sunday and form, as it were, a continuous thread. This constant presence of the Sunday Gospel is like a 'light' which illumines the Word we receive daily.

We told Fr. Brian this and he asked us to share our experience so we came together to see how each one would feel about this practice, how we saw the community and what effects it produced personally and as community. Without a doubt it has been very worthwhile and we wish to share it with you all.

(The Lord has given me a disciple's tongue. So that I may know how to reply to the wearied he provides me with speech. Every morning he wakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple. .Isaiah 50, 4)

Through the Word, God communicates with us and makes us participants in His life and love. Every day it teaches us and guides us where we must go. It is our Light and Wisdom in every moment. *(All that came to be had life in him (Word) and that life was the light of humankind. John 1, 4)*

The Word is always working in us and if we are open to this seed of the Word it will sprout and grow without our even noticing. It strikes each of us differently and being the same Word enlightens different aspects of our lives and enriches us. And so, with the practice of *Lectio Divina*, through its echoes, we hear God speak, not just to me personally, but also in and through my sisters.

The repetition throughout the week of the Gospel which we meditate, pray and contemplate together, makes us much more aware of the daily intervention of God in our own lives and in the life of the community and to see how He takes us by the hand to unite hearts which breathe with the rhythm of the Gospel - that is to say engendering peace,

humility and simplicity which are born of a life constantly in search of God. We share the life of Christ which comes to us through His Word proclaimed as grace and keeps us always in the here and now. In this Word Christ shows us His life, His thoughts, His feelings and way of acting, and He doesn't just show us but He enters into us. The act of praying together and sharing what the Word says to us is a great testimony of unity. We wish to live by God's life and pass it on to others so that they too may live it.

To know the God who comes to birth within me and within each of my sisters is to live the experience of Mary and Elizabeth in spiritual dialogue nourishing what they carry from God. When we speak with each other and in community about God His grace increases in the community. God visits us when we speak of Him and when we share the Word we have received from Him.

We all have the treasure and we are all searchers of that treasure and we know where it is. That is why we are able to say: 'here, there is water free for all those who are thirsty'. Coming together in *Lectio Divina* is a gift because we discover and share the experience and the image we each have of God. The Spirit of God who lives in us allows us to share dreams, hopes and desires, unites us and makes us grow in fraternity. And it is this Spirit of God Who speaks to us through this preaching and shows the community God's will for us and the path which we must follow.

This community practice leads to a praising of God which unites us as sisters in the name of His Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ; it is a blessing for each one of us from the hand of the Holy Spirit and a preaching which makes us live *always speaking with God about others or speaking to others about God.*

Monastery Santa María la Real
Bormujos – Sevilla (Spain)

Original: Spanish

Mysticism and Charm

(Fr Basilio Cosme, op, who belongs to the community of Dominican friars of Caleruega, wrote this article in the Diario of Burgos the 9th of June, with the occasion of the retreat that the Master gave to the nuns of Spain in Caleruega)

Fr. Carlos Aspíroz, Argentinean, Master of the Order of Preachers, is in Caleruega (Burgos).

There are about 80 monasteries of Dominican Nuns in Spain, with more than 1000 nuns. About 100 nuns from various monasteries are attending a retreat in Caleruega with the Master of the Order.



The person who freely enters the cloistered monastery as a nun, knows, that as the norm, she will dedicate herself to love God throughout the whole of her life in that monastery. Those who do this in a Dominican monastery, learn from the beginning that their founder, in the 12th century, was born in a town named Caleruega (Burgos), which is a point of reference for every Dominican, but those in the cloister are not able to visit here.

One day in the monastery there was a knock on the door when news came that a religious Martín Fierro, (like the original independent, heroic and sacrificed) was convoking the cloistered nuns for a retreat in Caleruega. Numbers were limited to 100 – the capacity of the Dominican retreat centre in Caleruega. Representatives came from 33 monasteries in Spain.

What the Pampa is for the Argentinean, Caleruega is for a member of the Dominican Family: the attractive enigmatic star which Dominic's godmother saw on his forehead on the day of his baptism. From material light it

passed into his charism and he in turn passed that charism on to many and it still lives in his sons and daughters who live his ideal with passion.

Basing his presentation on Biblical persons in the Old and New Testaments, the Master illustrated, with demanding depth, the characteristics of Christian and Dominican spirituality, succeeding in touching the depths of the soul in order to sublimate the human to the divine and penetrate each individual's conscience, giving them a desire for and the ability to commit themselves more fully to the ideal of their vocation - holiness.

Job, Jonah, Abraham, David, John the Baptist, the Samaritan woman . . . the homilies have deepened their fidelity, gratitude, and "spiritual itinerancy" . . .

The sung choral office, the Eucharist, the visits to Jesus exposed in the Blessed Sacrament, confession, the penitential act near the Crucifix. . . inspired perfect and moving exercises, in the house where our Father Dominic was born.

The major sacrifice? To eat in silence, with a mouth full of words.

A joy: to drink water from the well of St. Dominic.

A great proposal: Be more faithful to the love of God.

A great gratitude: (after God) to fr. Carlos, the Master, to fr. Mariano and fr. Brian, who helped the Master achieve such a good end.

And a sorrow: To leave, but that quickly turned to joy when they arrived at their monasteries.

The Lord began it . . . the Lord finished it.

Original: Spanish

Letter to the Master

(This letter, signed by the three Federal Mothers of the federations of Spain, was read in the name of the whole assembly at the end of the Eucharist the last day of the retreat.)

Dear Fr. Carlos;

We have just celebrated the Eucharist, the thanksgiving to God and we would like to go on for a moment proclaiming what we have said to the Lord: our gratitude for you. We are in the presence of the One who knows everything; the feelings of our hearts, feelings of love and gratitude. Today is 10th of June, it is not the memorable 15th of August in 1217 but the time has come for us to disperse in order to proclaim to the sisters what we have heard and seen and lived here, and God knows it, perhaps to continue to found and to amalgamate monasteries..., to create community, this is sure.

Like St. Dominic, you, father, throughout these years, have many times talked to us about the works of the Order, the urgencies of the Church and of the brothers who need to be evangelized; about the fire that must be intensified with the most joyful fidelity while drinking the cup of wine of fraternity and eating, maybe with wooden spoons, from the table of the one MISSION:

To seek

To ponder

And call upon Him in solitude so that...

During these nine years you have shown us a constant dedication, a great interest, a precise understanding of the importance of our vocation in the Order besides an effective affection which has wiped away many tears and have solved and enlightened many difficulties; the Lord, our Father St Dominic and you know how many missions and projects you have encouraged and blessed, how many faults you have absolved and how much devotion and love have been scattered in our monasteries, in documents, letters, interviews...

This morning in your presence we remember what you have said repeatedly:

TEACH US THE ORDER and you have encouraged us, revealed historic moments and suggested possibilities for the future according to the style and heart of St Dominic itinerant of God.

You told us repeatedly:

CATCH THE FIRE OF THE FIRST LOVE and for this you have filled us with enthusiastic closeness.

You have never demanded anything from us without providing us with all that is necessary for carrying it out.

For this reason today we are all together and unanimous - you can see it - sharing the table of the Bread of the Word and of the Eucharist, united in fraternal love seeking will of God with a big heart, as you have told us so many times during these days.

Look at us, Fr Master, we are nuns from all over the world; nuns of the three Federations. We are here.

We have looked into Dominic's well and we have seen in the bottom of it the same star of hope and we have drunk the same water, recognizing in each one of us our common vocation; we have seen the water of the spring of Blessed Jane's well and we have recognized in each other that other water which wells up to eternal life and it is the grace that we are all called to preach.

This year the Order celebrates the year of MISSION, the fifth anniversary of the arrival of the first friars to La Española, nowadays it is destroyed in Haiti. We assure you of our prayer for your intentions, for the General Chapter, for all the desires, which as the Master of the Order, you carry in the sanctuary of your heart.

Fr Brian, fr Mariano, during these days we have recognized in you those friars to whom our father St Dominic entrusted the spiritual care of the nuns and at the same time he requested us to give our life for the fecundity of your preaching: "...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".

Father Carlos, you have loved very much and for this reason you are loved by all of us, as it was said of our father St. Dominic. You bring

us the presence of Dominic of Guzmán in our midst.

The time has come when, fr. Carlos Azpiroz, will finish as the Master of the Order of Preachers, but for the nuns he will continue to be a master of evangelical and Dominican spirituality; a beloved brother who will continue to accompany us and exhort us with his word and his way of living.

This morning as we return to our monasteries renewed, we thank God and St. Dominic for you and for your work with us and for us.

May the sweet Virgin Mary, Mother of the Order, Mother of Mercy and Queen of the most holy Rosary intercede before the Lord Jesus for you - as we have prayed during these days and we will continue praying for it.

THANKS!

Original: Spanish

ICNOP Meeting - Caleruega June 2010



The international commission of the nuns held their annual meeting with the promoter Fr Brian Pierce OP at Caleruega from the 20th to the 28th June 2010. As each member will be sending a more detailed report to the monasteries of her respective region, here I will focus only on some highlights of this meeting – which is the last for the five of us who represent U.S.A., Mexico, Spain: Rosary federation, France and Europe. Fr Emiliano Zapata OP acted as translator from Spanish/English/Spanish.

Being in Caleruega, the birthplace of our holy father Dominic made a deep impression on us. The vast expanse of landscape, the rocks, the hills, the countryside, the friendly village people

and last but not least the warm welcome extended by our Dominican brothers and sisters will remain etched in our memory whenever we hear the name 'Caleruega'. It was a great privilege to join the local community of nuns for the celebration of Lauds and Eucharist throughout the week. Each evening we prayed Vespers as a group. One morning we celebrated the Eucharist in the underground chapel at the well which marks the exact spot where Dominic was born. Another day fr Jesus Martin accompanied us as our guide to Osma - pointing out all the places connected with Dominic. He not only made Dominic come alive but also Bl Jane and Bl Mannes. What impressed me most was the story he told us about Mannes when in 1234, after St Dominic's canonisation, he returned to Caleruega from Madrid. The people of Caleruega desired to build a large cathedral in Dominic's honour but Mannes replied: 'no, my brother was a humble man and would not like this; instead build a small chapel in his honour.' Mannes pointed out the exact place of the bedroom of their parents, Felix and Jane. The local people began to take the earth from this place as a relic to such an extent that a hole was dug in the ground and a well sprang up! This is what is known today as Dominic's well and is incorporated into the chapel which was built in his honour. Today this chapel is under the nuns' church.

It is always a great joy for us to visit the monasteries and meet our sisters. This year we had two such experiences – (1) the community of Caleruega invited us to Vespers followed by supper and recreation in their cloister garden – the local community of brothers joined us; (2) On our return journey from Osma we had the great joy of a similar experience with the community at Lerma. Both communities warmly welcomed us and gave us a tour of their monasteries while proudly displaying the work of their hands – delicious cookies at Caleruega and beautiful porcelain and ceramics at Lerma. Thank you sisters for your generous hospitality and kindness!

Of course, the large majority of our time together is dedicated to the work of the Commission. This year we worked from 9.45 till 14.00 taking a break mid morning and again

from 16.30 till 19.15 with a break mid afternoon. However it has been a labour of love on behalf of all nuns of the Order. The excellent working relationship and mutual trust we experience among ourselves make our work a pleasant experience.

As usual during the first days of the meeting each member presented a brief report on her region after which there was time for questions and discussion. While it is sad to hear about the difficulties with which some communities must cope – eg closure of monasteries, lack of vocations etc – it is a great joy and encouragement to hear about new communities and new vocations. This autumn there will be solemn professions for the first time in India and Vietnam – Fr Brian hopes to be present on both occasions. New communities are coming to birth in Bolivia and Mexico also.

In his report Fr Brian told us of the many workshops on *Lectio Divina* which he has undertaken in South America, US, Mexico, Africa, Europe – which have been greatly appreciated

and are a source of enrichment and formation for individuals and communities. While we would all like him to personally visit our community he pleads with us to understand that this is not physically possible for him! The best use of his time is for a few communities in a region to join together in one monastery for these workshops. One morning he shared with us his reflections on the final message of the Synod on the Word of God.

Monialibus was reviewed and various suggestions were discussed in an effort to continue to improve its quality. We encourage individuals and communities to continue to send articles for publication in *Monialibus*. Sr Isabel Maria will continue as editor for the coming three years. We congratulate her on the excellent work to date and are also grateful for the support of her community in this task.

The S.H.O.P. History course has proved to be a wonderful success. Those who are participating are greatly inspired and are sharing what they learn with their communities.

This must surely be a source of encouragement to Sr Barbara and her colleagues to continue the good work! Communities who have not yet sent an account of their monastery's history to the S.H.O.P. office in Fanjeaux are encouraged to do so during the coming months.

Other topics on the agenda were: the electronic catalogus which still remains incomplete; the creation of a virtual library for the nuns on the Order's web site – this would include articles (in all languages) and a bibliography which would be helpful for the nuns in their study – all are welcome to make suggestions regarding what to include in this library; Fr Brian introduced us to the video 'Gospel in Action' - more information on this is available on the Order's website. As we journey towards 2016 – the 800th anniversary of the confirmation of the Order - we are encouraged to continue to celebrate the themes of jubilee as set out by the Order.

Fr Felicísimo Martínez OP joined us one morning for a dialogue on his presentation: "Pedro de Córdoba's Community:

Dominican Preaching and the Order's present mission" – which we had read and reflected on beforehand. In due course this presentation will be circulated to the monasteries. Fr Felicísimo truly inspired us and gave us much food for thought - we were sorry that he had to leave us immediately after lunch.

During the coming months Fr Brian will initiate the process for selecting the five new members of the International Commission of Nuns. The monasteries in those regions will each be asked to present three names to help the Master of the Order in discerning possible sisters for the six year term on the Commission.

Our meeting concluded with an evaluation and since this was the last time for this particular group of sisters to be together we reflected on our experience as members of ICNOP. On Monday 28th some had an early start on their return journey and the remainder of us said 'farewell' to Caleruega shortly after breakfast – carrying in our hearts many beautiful memories of our time together.



Thanks to all our sisters at home who prayed for the success of this meeting. We remembered each and all of you in prayer at the holy places associated with our father Dominic.

Sr Breda Carrol,op

Original: English

Letter of the Master of the Order

Rome, June 21, 2010

To my contemplative sisters
of the International Commission of the Nuns
and to fr. Brian Pierce (Promoter General)

My dear sisters, dear brother:

Greetings from Rome a shortly before leaving for the United States for a fleeting visit to various communities in the Southern region (God willing it will be my last trip before the General Chapter).

I take this opportunity of your meeting in Caleruega, cradle of our Father Dominic, to send you a fraternal greeting. Also, this being the last meeting before terminating my mandate at the next General Chapter, there is need for special thanks.

Caleruega manifests, like few other places, some facets of the character of St. Dominic. In effect, it is the first landscape which formed his heart. You will recognize the vastness of the horizons, the special luminosity and transparency, the simplicity of the countryside and the firmness of the rocks. . . Do we not recognize in our Father that same breadth of vision -- the immensity of his charity -- the luminosity and transparency of his preaching, the simplicity of his behaviour, the firmness and fidelity of his temperament?

In that same environment we gathered some days ago -- fr. Brian and Sr. Dolores also participated -- together with an abounding group of nuns to share the spiritual exercises. Now you find yourselves there as the

International Commission to share the joys and hopes, sadness and anguishes of all the contemplative communities of the Order, of so many sisters, daughters of St. Dominic.

Prayer and liturgy, dialogue and fruitful exchange, the shared table, the visit to significant places of the life of St. Dominic: all serve to expand each one's heart to enlighten us regarding the truth of our present reality, to desire whole-heartedly evangelical simplicity, to try to be faithful to the ideal to which each one of you and each monastery have desired to embrace.

I thank you for the work you have done these years. Some of you may be finishing your service to the Order as members of the Commission, others will continue a few more years. The most important thing is that this ministry may have been fruitful and produced fruits in each one of you, in you Brian, in all the Order.

Blessed Cecilia, who loved St. Dominic so much, says very clearly that the sisters gathered in San Sixtus, Rome found themselves being attended to with solicitude by the Father of Preachers, Dominic Guzman, "because they didn't have another Master who would form them in the life of the Order." Two years later, in the spring of 1221, St. Dominic called at the door of the community of Prouille and eight sisters went to Rome. One of them, Sr. Blanca, was the first prioress of the Roman community. Just as St. Dominic desired, the sisters from the South of France taught the Order to their sisters gathered at San Sixtus (Rome) so some nuns from Rome went later to help the monasteries of St. Agnes in Bologna. . .

Keeping in mind this collaboration and dialogue which I have tried to maintain and promote with the communities, monasteries, federations and especially with you, the members of the International Commission since the beginning of my mandate, I conclude my letter. I do so exhorting you with occasion or without it, like St. Dominic would have done, like the nuns in Prouille would have done with the sisters of San Sixtus in Rome, and those from Rome with the nuns of Bologna, exhorting you once again: Form us in the life of the Order! Teach us the Order!

Fraternally in St. Dominic,
Fr. Carlos A. Azpiroz Costa, OP
Master of the Order

Original: Spanish

From Prague

Dear Sisters,

We are a community of seven nuns of the Monastery in Prague, Czech Republic. Since 1990 we have been living in a house on the periphery of Prague. Our brothers lived here during the time of communism and after the Velvet Revolution they gave it to us. Because the place was small, we had an extension built in 1994. The house cannot be extended again nor adapted to offer better conditions for contemplative life since it is part of a range of houses. From the beginning we have been aware of our provisory living conditions and have been praying to find a solution to our situation as well as seeking ways of how to solve it. The only acceptable way, so it seems, is to build a new house (even financially this is the easiest way).

Like other contemplative monasteries, our community also attracts people who want to share our life and draw from our spiritual experience. Apart from that, there is no church in our part of Prague and the parish church is quite far away; our chapel already serves people from the vicinity, but it is spatially insufficient; just as our guest quarters that, presently, is just a small room. As part of the monastic building we want to build a proportionate guest house.

We have long tried to do something about a new monastery, but last autumn we were visited by an architect who was charged with drafting a section of the city development plan for our district, as part of the whole city development plan. Our lady mayor asked him to discuss with us variants of a possible place for our monastery in the future city development plan. We have found a place and the owner of the property is willing to deal with us regarding a purchase under reasonable conditions. Even

the local municipality expressed a 100% support of our plan. We have an urban study done and our municipality as well as the owner of the property both submitted our project as their own proposal to the city council. Well informed people say it is very likely that our project will be approved – possibly by the end of this year. That is why we start seeking means of how to realize it. The whole project, including the property costs and the running costs for the first decade, is estimated to 1,900,000-2,700,000 EUR.

Please, pray for us to continue to discern God's will and to be able to raise enough funds and have the courage to carry out this project that seems to be desired by the people around us. If you know of anyone who could support us materially, let us know, please. We are preparing a presentation of the project on our web-site: www.moniales.praha.op.cz

We remain united with you in prayer,

Your sisters, Dominican Nuns from Prague, Czech Republic

Original: English

Open Forum

In the last meeting of the ICNOP (Caleruega, June 2010), the Commission decided to give a new focus to this section because it is difficult to keep an open forum in a bulletin which is edited twice a year. We decided to keep the name while introducing a new dynamic, that is, the Open Forum will continue being "open" to all who wish to participate but the topic will be the same in two or three issues, as we see fit.

In this issue we keep the topic of "Ongoing Formation" and because of its importance for our life, it will continue in the next issue also. I encourage you to participate.

Original: Spanish

*Loving God with all our
capacity for understanding*

Study in Dominican monastic life

1- Is study an authentic observance for the nuns?

"Study is a fundamental element of our life, a true observance of the Order," one that the Blessed Father in some way recommended to the first sisters. We read in chapter 20 of the constitutions of Saint Sixtus, in regard work: "Except for the hours reserved for prayer, reading, preparation of the Divine Office and of chant, or *for study*, everyone should apply herself carefully to manual work, according to the directives of the prioress." (Cf. LCM 103, 3.) In the Constitutions of Humbert of Romans (1259) this passage has become: "With the exception of the hours and times employed in prayer, at the Divine Office, or other necessary duties, all should apply themselves zealously to doing some manual work useful for all, according to the orders given them." And in the Constitutions of 1930: "According to the horarium of the Monastery, all should busy themselves with some manual work useful for the community, outside of the hours for prayer, for the Office or for some necessary occupation...." (# 298)

What really is study and its place in the life of Dominican nuns? Our present Constitutions are now a little more than twenty years old and it may seem to us that reflect Dominican life of every era. But it belongs to Dominican legislation to be continually developing thanks to the work of General Chapters. The historical research that I have been able to do on this subject is fragmentary and brief, because I have not had many resources to carry it out. I have confined myself to the Unterlinden origins and to much more recent texts, such as the *Constitutions of the Dominican Second Order Sisters*, translated and commented on by Fr. Marie-Ambroise Potton (Paris, 1878); Customary for the use of the Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament at Oulliins (Bar le-Duc, 19000; Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers approved by his Holiness

Pope Pius XI (1930); Encyclical Letter of Very Rev. Fr. Martin Stanislaus Gillet, Master General, to the contemplative Sisters Preacheresses, on the New Constitutions (Rome, 1931); Little Customary and Horarium of the Monastery of St. John the Baptist, New Unterlinden (manuscript text of 1927); Customary of the Monastery of the Dominican Nuns of Lourdes (Toulouse, 1938); Book of the Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers (1971).

We would like to know: in what did study (eruditio litterarum) consist, the study of which the Constitutions of St. Sixtus speak. We do not know if this reference is from St. Dominic himself or if it existed in the rule followed by the sisters before their being brought together by St. Dominic. The Latin term used, litterae, can in the Christian vocabulary mean Sacred Scripture. That it is a question of the study of Scripture is more than probable; because St. Dominic himself hurried to pass from profane studies to the study of theology and set himself eagerly to be nourished with the Holy Scriptures, he could only propose to the sisters, for study, the word of God. We note that for Jordan the study of Scripture is equivalent to theology -- the rupture between spirituality and theology nor yet having begun.

Sr. Elie has the cultural evidence [for our question] from the *Lives of the Sisters*. Sr. Hedwig of Steinbach, who as a child entered the Benedictine monastery of Steinbach, came to Unterlinden at the time of its foundation (1232). It is thanks to her that the choir sisters would be benefit from a formation in Sacred Scripture and in choral singing (p.365, line 3). Sr. Agnes of Ochsenstein (p. 357) recites the Psalter nightly and wonders about the inspiration of the prophets, for some passages seem to her to be obscure and even absurd. Her eyes were opened in an ecstasy and she contemplated in the light of eternity the prophetic writings and the revealed mysteries of the supremely incomprehensible essence of the Deity, and the Incarnation of the Lord our Saviour, and she understood that the writings had been done under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Sr. Tude of Colmar (p. 429) one day received a surprising understanding of the Scriptures which she had

not known at all. For two years she had the divine gift of penetrating to the deepest meaning of the words of the liturgy and of the readings done in the refectory daily, but she lost this gift for having spoken a proud word. Sr. Elizabeth of Cernay (p. 451) had the habit of reading a passage from the Scriptures every day. Cured of a serious illness by the evangelist and doctor Luke, whom the Lord sent to her, she received from him the gift of penetrating the meaning of the Scriptures, where before she had had no understanding. In these lives it is not the formation received from Sr. Hedwig of Steinbach which had enlightened the sisters, but a heavenly intervention. However what is even more remarkable is that the sisters were listening to the Scriptures and searching for understanding of them. At the time, the choir sisters knew not only how to read Latin without mistakes, but also to understand it. Sr. Catherine of Gueberschwih, who entered the monastery at a young age, was not satisfied only with writing the lives of these first sisters, but also with integrating very cleverly into her text numerous borrowings from the Latin *Life of St. Dominic* by Thierry d'Apolda, that she knew perfectly.

Study is seen to be an important cultural element in the German monasteries, according to the measures taken by Br. Hermann of Minden, provincial of Teutonia and Saxony from 1286 to 1290, following the revolt of the brethren who were weighed down by the pastoral care of the nuns. As Fr. They, o.p., writes in his historical introduction to the sermons of Tauler: "Where to find a sufficient number of directors? Would it not derail, deflect, the religious too much from the proper and first goal of the Order: study, teaching, preaching, the fight against heresy, the far-off missions?" Hermann of Minden, aware of his responsibilities and wanting the instruction of the sisters to correspond to the religious and intellectual culture of the Order, took a step which had great consequences for the orientation of Dominican mysticism. He decided that the Fathers who would have charge of the direction of the sisters would have to be well-instructed religious, and that their teaching of the sisters would be frequent. "See to it that the

Sisters do not lack the nourishment of the Word of God but that it be preached to them often and in accordance with their education, by learned brethren." These learned brethren were first of all the lectors and masters of theology. They had to take care that the nourishment of the Word of God not be lacking to the Sisters.

One might have feared that the decision of Brother Hermann of Minden might not have had the effect he hoped for. But the *Lives of the Sisters* proves that this was not so. Beginning with Life #49, the lives are no longer the work of Sr. Catherine of Gueberschwih. We pass over into another century. Sr. Elizabeth Kempf, who entered the monastery at age six, in 1421, received there a solid formation and acquired a remarkable erudition. The Master of the Order, Conrad d'Asti, during his visit to Unterlinden, did not know German but admired the ease with which she conversed with him in Latin. During her time as prioress, other sisters were able to translate into German the Latin works which their sisters could not otherwise have understood. However, these gifts and this culture were put at the service of a reform (the Dominican reform of the 15th. Century), very necessary at the time, surely, but which failed to reach its goal. Fascination for whatever would return to the sources exalted a strict observance, a rigorous ascetic discipline, numerous devotional practices at the expense of spirituality. At the cultural level, every literary creation dried up in favour of a considerable production of copies and translations of works inviting to devotion. Rhineland mysticism had lived itself out at Unterlinden.

With this sombre observation we leave the Middle Ages and leap forward several centuries. Let us retain from this first period that the Word of God is the centre of the sisters' lives – certainly at the Divine Office but also in the teaching that they received and in their personal meditation. But to the extent that Latin is no longer understood, there are other readings being used to nourish the sisters' life of prayer and reflection. From *Lectio Divina* we pass over to spiritual reading, and even more easily so when the Bible becomes an inaccessible book, from the time of the Reform.

A little research about study, in the

commentary by Fr. Potton on the Constitutions and on two Customaries before the Gillet Constitutions: He comments briefly on Chapter 28 of the Constitutions, on work: "The text shows clearly enough that the sisters are not bound to be always in the common workroom but can spend some time in their cells, or elsewhere, for private prayers, to say Rosaries, for spiritual reading -- following what the prioress or the Customary of each convent directs" (p. 300). What is said about reading in the refectory is very instructive: during every meal there must be reading (Rule of St. Augustine). Contrary to what is done among the Brethren, the sisters do not begin and end a meal with reading of Sacred Scripture. On days which are not solemnities, there can be inserted into the table reading something from the Constitutions or its commentaries, in such a way that the whole book is read each year" (p. 136). We can complete this inventory by adding the "point for meditation": at the beginning of the prayer time, a short reading of devotion can be done, to serve as nourishment for spirit and heart" (C. 106), (p. 111). "Spirit and heart" here could be an allusion to the two powers of the soul – understanding and will - which play an important role in meditation and in contemplation. The word "study" does not appear in this commentary.

The *Customary for the use of the Monastery of Oullins*, edited by Mother Maria Dominica who re-founded Unterlinden, teaches us something about the spiritual reading done. Every day when the sisters come together for work in common, there is spiritual reading which should last for 20 minutes is done -- excepting however the days when there has been or will be a sermon. The sisters work while she who has this charge does the reading. Every day the reading begins with one or more paragraphs from commentaries on the Rule or from the Constitutions of Humbert of Romans. Other titles were: the *Dialogues* of St. Catherine of Siena, the *Conferences* of Cassian, the *Holy Ladder* of St. John Climacus, the *Letters* and the *Works* of St. Jeanne de Chantal, the *Way of Perfection* of St. Teresa, the *Spiritual Counsels* of St. Francis de Sales. Especially in the refectory, there is reading from the Lives of the Saints or of

other persons famous for their piety and devotion to the Church, works on the history of the Church, pious annals, etc." Contrary to what Fr. Potton says, at supper or collation, on Saturday and the eve of certain feasts, the Epistle and Gospel of the next day were read. "Besides participating in community and refectory reading, each choir sister can and must do individual spiritual reading. No one should ask for a library book without permission" (p. 41 ff.).

The little Customary [directory] of New Unterlinden also knew about reading in common during work, and individual reading. Sundays and holidays this individual reading is done in choir. "It is permissible however to do it elsewhere; for example, for the purpose of taking notes" (p. 13). On ordinary days "the sisters, provided that they have fulfilled all their assigned duties, can apply themselves, if they have the taste for it, to some intellectual work, beginning at 4:30 p.m." (p. 42). Since prayer was at 5, that gave them a half-hour for study. "To take notes," means to apply oneself seriously to the reading one is doing; one wishes to retain something, to assimilate it. Sr. r Mary of the Holy Spirit, who entered at 19, filled booklet after booklet with the notes from her readings -- from the sermons of Tauler, for example. Sometimes she would approach some one of us with one of these notebooks and show that sister what she thought would be useful to her, and she was not mistaken. This little Customary was composed and written out by Sr. Mary Catherine of Siena de Prat, of the monastery of Chatenay during her prioral term at Logelbach (1927-1930). She seems to have been attentive to study, and especially to the need and desire for study on the part of some of the young women who were entering the monastery. She brought a young sister from her own monastery to watch over the reading of the sisters in formation.

The formation of young women, some of whom came from university, and whose mentality was very different from that of their elders, was a preoccupation of Fr. Gillet also. Brother Carlos quotes his letter which accompanied the new constitutions of the nuns. The need of this new youth to know and judge everything can appear to some of their

Prioresses and Novice Mistresses irreconcilable with their vocation and they would willingly have stifled it, from the beginning, in the name of humility and obedience. The Master of the Order saw in that a serious danger of disappointing and even of scandalizing the young. "Would there not be some presumption in thinking that voluntary religious ignorance...better prepares souls for receiving God's grace, contemplation in particular, than does a prudent but habitual contact with revealed truth under the form of teaching, or of authorized and supervised readings?" he asks. His solution to the problem seems to resemble that of Br. Hermann of Minden: "To find one or more priests, one or more religious who regularly, or at close intervals, would be charged with providing doctrinal teaching to the novices, and who would also agree to organize a special library for their use." What follows is very wise: "In this way nothing of this kind is imposed on the older sisters – older and besides, already sanctified -- who are not troubled by the need for knowledge. But in the long run, a day will come when, after many generations of novices formed in this way, the same type of teaching can be extended to all the community without provoking any surprise, like something entirely natural." This was almost a prophetic vision; some seventy years later another Master of the Order could write to the nuns: "Many theological writings are enormously boring; but perhaps that is because they are bad theology. ... The indicator of good theology is that it expands into prayer, adoration, happiness, an authentic inner liberty. There exists too little theology that is as good as that. Perhaps the nuns are called to write it." (2)

But in 1930 the ideas of Fr. Gillet were still very new and he offered reassurance: "It is not a question, my sisters - I say in conclusion - of filling the convents with intellectuals or of holding that in a contemplative life, knowledge is more valuable than love. That would be disastrous. Not intellectuals, no; instructed religious, yes. It is a matter of adding in our monasteries another to the effective means of sanctification and of apostolate, one which fits well with the Dominican vocation: the need to know God for contemplating him and, having

contemplated him, to communicate to others the fruits of one's contemplation." What emerges from these texts is that study did not really figure among the observances of a monastery and that there was even a certain mistrust toward it and toward that which was called "intellectual." Knowledge puffs us up, said St. Paul.

When I went through the Gillet Constitutions I was very surprised. There is an abyss between his letter of presentation and the legislative text itself. Then I learned that the Constitutions were already finished and approved by the Sacred Congregation for Religious when Fr. Gillet was elected Master of the Order; he only promulgated them. These Constitutions mention spiritual reading. The sisters should use, for that purpose, books about asceticism which have been approved by the church and are by preference by authors of the Order or of the history of the Order (# 287). A chapter is devoted to the library. This "should contain books on the lives of the saints and blessed of our Order, the spiritual treatises and other books written by our saints and blessed, or by other venerable authors of the Order. There should also be Reviews published for the faithful by Fathers of the Order (n. 605). Besides, the librarian "should take care of the books of the Community, place them in an orderly way in the library, make a catalogue of them, and keep the key (n. 607)."

These new Constitutions were not well received by all the nuns. Some really thought that in accepting them they would have to renounce monastic austerities -- the honour of the Order -- and one of the traditional means of realizing their vocation. Fr. Gillet sent an encyclical letter to his dear Daughters to explain to them that "the most rigorous monastic observances are never anything but one means among others to lead to contemplation. That alone can be the goal of the contemplative life," and he recalled to them that one does not enter a convent to be forever isolated from the world by enclosure and thrown headlong into the holy observances. "If the goal of all religious life is charity, the distinctions between different forms of religious life come from the works of charity

they accomplish toward God and toward neighbour. The contemplative life receives its name from the contemplation in which consists the only work of charity toward God. Dominican contemplatives have three ways to realize their vocation: choral recitation of the divine office; assiduous study of Christian doctrine; and monastic observances.

Fr. Gillet gives an extended treatment of the second of these means: the study of sacred doctrine. In resume: "to love God in contemplation, one must first know Him in the supernatural knowledge which faith procures. ... If faith is infused, the truths to be believed are not. To be received in the intelligence, assimilated by it, these have to be learned. This is why children learn their catechism. It is also why, and for even better reasons, our dear daughters like their brothers in St. Dominic (due proportion being observed), should give themselves to the study of sacred doctrine. ... Surely charity is more needed for contemplation than is study. God can always by his grace and his gifts supply for the involuntary ignorance of souls who seek him with sincere love; besides, one can be a learned theologian without being a contemplative, if one is lacking in charity. No one intends to deny these clarities. But exceptions should not prevail over necessity, or better, over the duty of state; contemplatives should put all their good will into assimilating by study, under the direction of experienced teachers, the truths of faith, the truths outside of which the mystical or interior life would not have its guarantee or develop in security. When we have the honour of belonging to the Order of Truth, the Truth should not make us afraid."

The Customary (Directory) of the Monastery of Lourdes (1938) speaks explicitly of study in relation to the half hour of daily private reading (p. 100ff.): "It is not a matter, we hasten to say, of a totally speculative exercise, nor of curiosity – purely natural curiosity of spirit which would tend to make intellectuals of us. May the Lord preserve our Monastery from this deviation! It is a matter of a work of loving attention and savouring reflection on the part of a soul who is listening to the Divine Thought" and who is searching to know God better only in order to love Him more...It is only for union

with God that we ought to force ourselves to acquire truth and to assimilate it." Is it to convince the mistrustful that the author calls on the authority of St. Thomas who "threw light on the role of study in the contemplative life? "Study, says Thomas, helps the interior life in two ways: (1) directly, by enlightening the spirit; (2) indirectly, by protecting us against the dangers of the contemplative life, that is, the errors which can slip into contemplation of the things of God among those who are ignorant of sacred doctrine. Dominican souls, consecrated to the Truth, let us not then neglect any of the means which can enlighten our faith and strengthen our love. Thanks be to God, we have a well furnished library, a real treasure where we all can find the spiritual nourishment adapted to our capacities, to our needs, to our attractions. We also have the necessary time." As a last caution: "The whole thing is to put oneself completely in line with obedience, and to remember well that though study plays an important role in the progress of our interior life, to deliver ourselves to it with excessive ardour would be to act to the detriment of the very intimacy with God which is cultivated especially by purity of heart, humility, the spirit of sacrifice, loving adherence to all He wills, and the recollection of contemplation."

In the 1950s there arose the question of a revision, even a re-writing, of the 1930 Constitutions. The process begun in 1958 would result, after Vatican Council II and its call for renewal, in the ad experimentum [draft] Constitutions promulgated by Fr. Fernandez in 1971. Let us look now in chapter III at the first section of those articles concerned with study, entitled, in the French edition, "la Parole de Dieu," "the Word of God" (LCM 1971, nn.100-109).

The Latin title of chapter III is: *De auditione et custodia Verbi Dei* (On hearing and keeping the Word of God) . This chapter corresponds to chap. IV of LCO: "The ministry of the Word of God," and not to the LCM chap. III on study: "The nuns, especially deputed by God for prayer, are not thereby deprived of all ministry of the Word." (Cf. Acts 6: 2-4: "It is not fitting that we abandon the Word of God for the sake of waiting on tables...As to us, we will

remain assiduous in prayer and in the service of the word.”). Although for them “there is no preaching’ the life of cloistered religious is here compared to the lives of the apostles themselves. We are sent back to the Instruction *Veritate seorsum*, V: “Another element of the mystery of the contemplative life that this fittingly clarifies is its sign-importance and witness, and thanks to which even the cloistered religious also have a “ministry of the word.” By listening, celebrating and keeping the Word of God (cf. Lk. 11:18), they proclaim by the very example of their lives the Gospel of God.” If the preaching is not “by word,” it is “by example.”

The nuns’ ministry of the Word consists in hearing, celebrating and keeping it, and all of the chapter is constructed around those three verbs. Numbers 101- 106 are consecrated to Listening to the Word, listening to Christ whom we hear in different ways (101) and to whom we listen when we read the Holy Books (102). Here there appears for the third time (cf. 56 and 97) the term Lectio Divina, completely unknown in earlier constitutions, but given here as self-evident. The insistence of the Constitutions on the Reading of the Word of God is the beautiful fruit of the biblical renewal of the twentieth century, with Vatican Council II as the propagator. At the heart of the chapter are four numbers (103 to 106) and two Ordinations on study which thus becomes part of listening to the Word of God, and the benefits and object of which are enumerated. After our historical study we understand better why care was taken to say: “the access of the sisters to the library should be easy” (105). Number 107 speaks of the liturgy as the place where we celebrate the Word. Numbers 108 and 109 make explicit what it is to Keep the Word, coming back to the sign and witness value of our life, and thus finish the chapter with a kind of “inclusion.”

The bearing of the chapter is not so much the way it speaks of study as it is the way it speaks of the part the nuns have in evangelization of the word of God; this is the special purpose of the Order of Preachers, and the way in which the friars participate in the mission of the Apostles. The accent is not on study and during the revision of these Constitutions, with their final approbation in

view, this was pointed out. In fact, in the definitive Constitutions of 1987, Chapter III was completely reorganized in order to insist rather on study.

“Much overturned,” said Fr. Duval about chapter III when he presented the Constitutions to our community. All the articles had been adopted but in a different order and there were additions, some of which came from LCO. It was a new edition, and it is not surprising that Fr. Duval had himself felt turned upside down, for the beautiful architecture of the first edition had completely disappeared and the announced plan had not been respected.

In the French edition, chapter III has always had the title “The Word of God,” while the Latin text became “The hearing, study and keeping of the Word of God.” Study now appeared in the title. Besides, mention of study had been added to LCM 1-5: “fervent in the study of the truth.” It is found also in the new LCM paragraph 35-2, on the elements which belong to regular observance, among them: “the assiduous study of truth.”

Chapter III includes, after the rearrangement, an introductory number (96) and two articles: Lectio divina and Study. The remark about easy access to the library has disappeared --an example of something which had become useless. In its place there is a recommendation about budgeting a sufficient sum for the acquisition of books. LCM 103-1 from 1971 became 100-1 and 101 -2, on the benefits of study, much enlarged and closer to LCO 83. LCM 101-1 on the source and light of study, is new, and reproduces LCO 78. In my opinion, the reorganization of this chapter is not a success. Still, the impression of a certain blurring is probably due also to the translation. For example, in LCM 100-1, “a methodical study of theology” is surprising since the subject is Lectio Divina. One could expect an exegetical or biblical study also could help with a fruitful Lectio Divina. In Latin it is “study of sacred truth that we find at LCM 35-2. There it is translated by (assiduous) “study of the truth.” Clearly one can ask oneself whether “sacred truth” refers to Scripture, or to theology which in its beginnings was nothing other than study of the Scriptures.

I end the first part of my article with a brief resume. From the beginning, study is a characteristic - and new - observance of the Order for the friars, but for the sisters also, I think. The text of the Constitutions of San Sixtus is the witness to that. Even if the text of the Constitutions no longer mentions study beginning with Humbert of Romans, the custom must already have existed. If not, why would Fr. Hermann of Minden insist that the sisters must not lack nourishment from the Word of God? This nourishment had been given them by the instruction of the friars, but at least some of the sisters were capable of scrutinizing the Scriptures themselves. Spiritual reading came to mitigate the impossibility of access to the bible. In the course of centuries, there were high and low points; the concern of Fr. Gillet for the formation of young sisters certainly was not without a real foundation. Even today, certain mistrust, when study is emphasized a bit, exists here and there. The past century brought extraordinary riches: the liturgical renewal, access to the texts of the Fathers of the Church, and especially access to the Scriptures. We have tools for work of every kind and various possibilities for forming ourselves and for studying; but, paradoxically, have we the taste for study, the desire to know better in order to love more?

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Original: french

About Formation

At the beginning of a new period of six years in the Federation of St. Dominic, we have commenced a new formative period for the temporary Professed Sisters.

For this the Book of Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers is the guiding axis in its teaching lines (Our Federation has this reflected in the Formationis Ratio)

Throughout this period, we will insist on the importance of integral formation. We propose to form from life and for life, to form

from Christ and for Christ, to form from the monastic Dominican Community and for the same. We form them in a progressive way not isolated; not temporary but continuous.

The first thing to take into account is that formation is not about acquiring a lot of knowledge (even if it be very spiritual knowledge) that influences our mind only without motivating our actions.

Formation embraces the whole of one's life from beginning to end, although it takes place in different stages, with diverse nuances and various ways.

We could define formation as "something" which helps us to be, to be a person, and in our case, to be consecrated - contemplative- Dominican women. We must bear in mind that God is the only one who forms us. He is the principal agent and he makes use of human temporal and circumstantial instruments to carry out this formation on us.

"God the Father, through the unceasing gift of Christ and the Spirit, is the educator par excellence of those who consecrate themselves to him. But in this work he makes use of human instruments" (V.C. N° 66).

"Formation should therefore have a profound effect on individuals so that their every attitude and action, at important moments as well as in the ordinary events of life, will show that they belong completely and joyfully to God". (V.C. 65)

We would like to take into account the different factors that the formation depends on: 1° The totality of the person.- The first key to understand formation is to be aware that formation affects the whole person, not only my intelligence, nor the way I behave but my whole being, for this reason formation must be integral, that is total, otherwise it is not a real formation. The human person is much more than ideas and actions. The person is intellect, will, but also affections, emotions, feelings.... If all this is not evangelized nor opened up of God's action then formation is not properly achieved, or it is false. One can appear to be educated while remaining inwardly empty.

2° Dimensions of the Formation. - Human dimension, spiritual dimension, dimensions in Community and theological formation.

The human dimension is the basis; if there is not a subject in the woman or in the nun we don't have anybody to educate. This is the most fundamental dimension.

The spiritual dimension: for us it is the most important. Everything stems from this. If a person decides to consecrate herself to God because she thinks this is her vocation while at the same time the spiritual life lacks importance for her she will not make any progress. If there is not an intense love for Jesus Christ then there is no vocation.

Dimension in Community: it is for the habitat we develop our contemplative vocation. Everything revolves around it. You know what the Rule of St. Augustine says: "the main purpose for your having come together is to live harmoniously in your house, intent upon God in oneness of mind and heart".

Our consecrated life is life in community. For this reason we cannot scorn the dimension in community in our way of formation.

Theological Formation: We cannot undervalue the theological knowledge which will enlighten our intelligence with knowledge about God.

We must know Him better in order to love more. Only what is known is loved. Could we not "know" about God to whom we have consecrated our existence? From here is born the value of study whether it be Christology, Bible, Patristic, History of the Church, etc....

3° Objective evangelical totality.- Although we are formed in a particular charism this doesn't exclude any aspect of the Gospel. In religious life we are formed in a particular charism but this charism is a way of living the totality of the Gospel. The charism never substitutes for the totality of the Gospel. We can only have a solid and true formation if we are open to the whole of the Gospel.

4° Chronological totality (all of life).-Formation must embrace the whole of one's life in a chronological sense.

Authentic formation does not end at any stage of one's life but it continues until death.

These are some of the points on the subject of formation which we will keep in mind during the coming six years.

We think that all this is in accordance with the material exposed by Sr. M^a Breda Carroll, op in the previous Monialibus.

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